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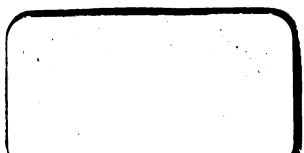
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THE
LIFE GUARDSMAN.

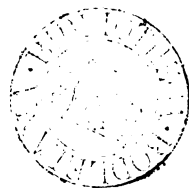
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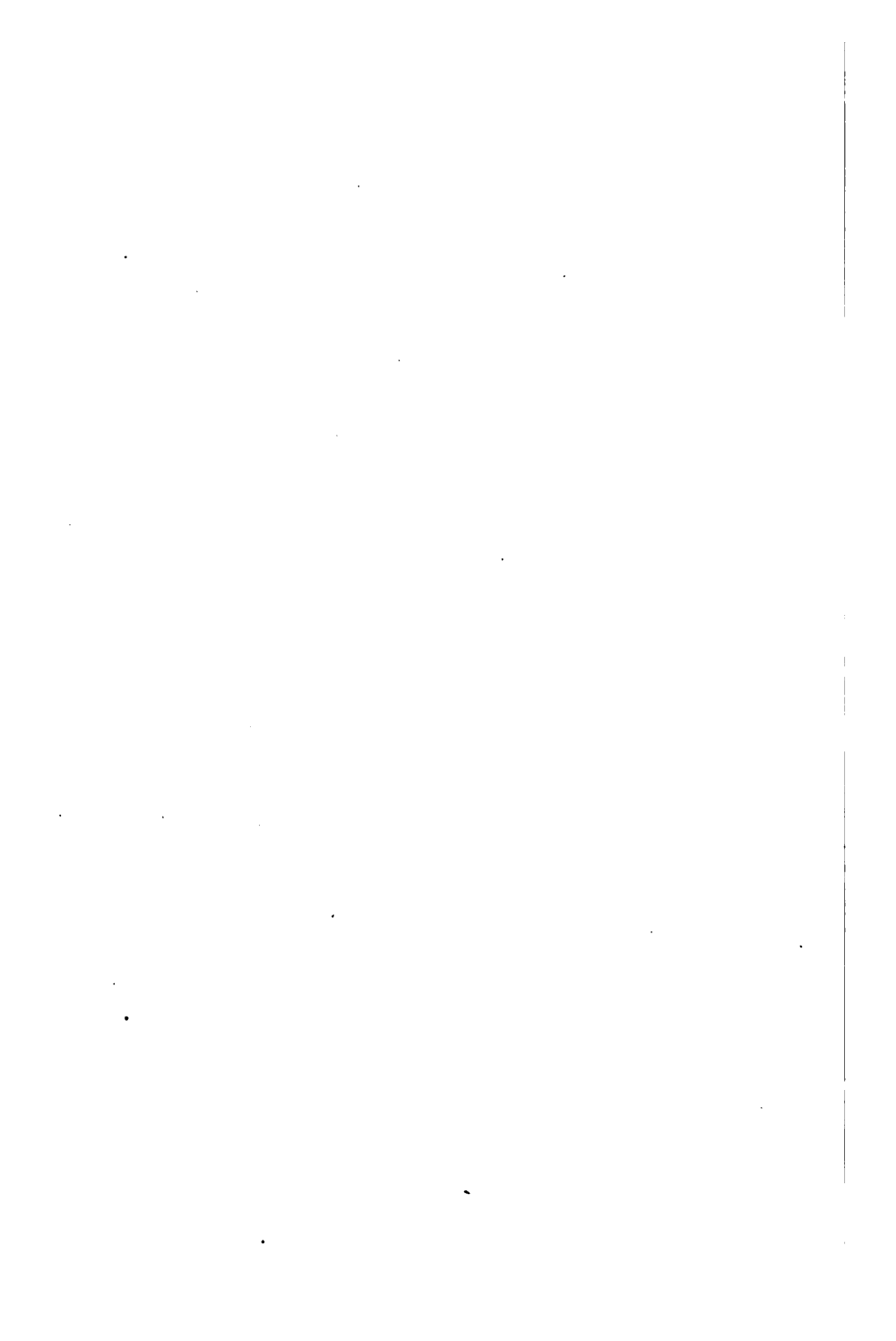
IN THREE VOLUMES.
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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE ISLAND OF LOBAU	1
II. THE SPIRIT OF THE DANUBE	17
III. "PARTANT POUR LA SYRIE"	35
IV. PRINCE EUGENE	49
V. WAGRAM	62
VI. THE DEAD DRAGOON	82
VII. ACROSS THE THAYA	100
VIII. LA REINE HORTENSE	112
IX. CARLO AND CARLINE	121
X. NAVARRE	135
XI. THE BANKS OF THE ITON	149
XII. AFLOAT ONCE MORE	163
XIII. A FRIGATE ACTION	177

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. A SAILOR'S TALE	189
XV. THE RUSSIAN BOYARD	203
XVI. THE ESCAPE	220
XVII. THE PASSAGE OF THE NIEMEN	240
XVIII. THE WIFE'S FAREWELL	255
CONCLUSION	267
APPENDIX	275

THE LIFE GUARDSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLAND OF LOBAU.

THE island of Lobau was crowded with the broken troops. Boats and barges were keeping up, as well as they could, communication with the shore, while strong fatigue parties were preparing to restore the bridge.

Men of every arm of the service were crowded round the watch-fires. There were the bronzed features of the voltigeurs of the guard, artillerymen, still black with

smoke ; hussars and lancers, and there, too, was the gallant Forty-third, who, when their ammunition had failed, held the village of Essling with the bayonet only. The men looked dejected, and the sullen roar of the river could be heard, while, far away on the plains of Marchfeld, hundreds of lights moved to and fro. The fatigue parties were burying the dead.

Sergeant Pimpernet was as smart as ever. True, his uniform was torn, and blackened by powder, but he had managed to clean himself, and furbish up his arms, and there he sat, telling tales, by the fire, laughing and joking with the men and officers, and creating life and merriment around. Nothing could shake his confidence in Napoleon.

"Sapristi," he muttered, bending over Louis, who was fast asleep beside the blaze,

"the lad sleeps soundly. Don't wake him, mes enfants. If he hadn't swam the Danube, and those hussars had charged—"

"Why more colours would have been lost than the Forty-third lost at Austerlitz," said a corporal of the regiment of Alsace, laughing.

"How was that, Pimpernet? tell us," asked a young recruit near, who was wrapping a linen bandage round his leg, torn by a musket ball.

"Well, we belonged to Vandamme's division, then," said Pimpernet, nothing loath, "and we had sustained the charge of the whole of the Russian Imperial Guard."

"And lost your standard," interrupted the corporal.

Pimpernet was not to be put out of temper. He knew he should get the best of it.

"Some days after, there was a grand

review, and the 'Petit Caporal' halted before the Forty-third. His face looked very stern, I can tell you, and there was many a one present, who would rather have stood another charge from the Russian Guard, than look at him.

"'Soldiers,' he asked, 'what have you done with the eagle I gave you, and which you swore to defend with your lives?'

"Not a soul answered him. At last our major advanced to the front.

"'Sire,' he said, saluting, and I could see his hand tremble like an aspen leaf, as he faced the Emperor. 'Sire, our standard bearer was killed just as we changed front to the right, and he was never missed in the tumult of the charge.'

"'And what did you do, sir, without colours?' said the Emperor.

“ ‘Sire, we went to look for more,’ and at a sign, two men advanced, each bearing a Russian eagle.

“The Emperor smiled.

“ ‘I take the two,’ he said, ‘and you shall have yours back.’ ”

“C’est égal,” said the corporal. “Two eagles wasn’t any great things to take at Austerlitz.”

“Captain Louis De Brissac,” cried an orderly, “sent for by the Emperor.”

Louis sprang to his feet.

“Thanks, Pimpernet, my friend, I’m all right now, ready for anything,” he said, as he followed the orderly.

“Captain De Brissac! Did you hear that, Cousin Louise?” said the sergeant, laughing.

It was past midnight, a fire was burning, and near it sat the Emperor, surrounded

by a group of generals. A mound of turf formed his seat, and on his knee lay open a map of the Danube. Two grenadiers stood near, holding each a blazing torch.

"The army of Italy, sire, must effect a junction with us at once, at all hazards," Massena observed, as Louis came up.

"Stay," said the Emperor. "Silence!" and he rose as he spoke, uncovering his head.

Six grenadiers of the guard came on, bearing a litter. It was Lannes, his knees smashed by an Austrian ball, and a murmur of sorrow and pity could be heard around, for the Bayard of the French army lay there dying. The grenadiers, at a sign from the Emperor, laid the litter down. Kneeling on one knee, Napoleon bent over him.

"Lannes, do you know me? It is your Emperor, your friend, who speaks. Lannes, Lannes, you will be spared to us."

At the sound of the voice he loved, the dying soldier revived, the torch-light flashing redly over the pinched features.

"I wish to live if I can serve you and France, but within an hour you will have lost one who loved you well," he answered slowly and feebly. "The map, sire. The map," he gasped.

Grasping the Emperor's hand, he placed his forefinger on a spot which was marked Wagram.

"It is the key of their position, sire. I knew it when too late," and Lannes fell back, fainting.

The Emperor bent over the litter. Once, twice, thrice, he pressed his lips on

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The Emperor bent over the litter. Once, twice, thrice, he pressed his lips on

the cold clammy forehead. His face was stern and rigid.

"Farewell, Lannes," he said, "I will avenge you at Wagram;" and then, at a sign from him, the grenadiers lifted their burden, the ranks of the spectators opened, for the men had crowded around, and the dying man passed on his way.

"The sooner the junction is effected the better," insisted Massena. And Soult, Le-febre, Grouchy, were soon eagerly bending over the map, discussing the details of the campaign.

"We are short of everything," urged General Boudet; "my fellows were eating horse flesh when I left them, rubbing gun-powder into the meat, to give it a flavour, as they said."

"At all events they have plenty of wine, general. I saw to that myself, days since,"

said Napoleon, looking up, though he still kept his finger fixed on the spot marked in the map, Wagram.

"Parbleu, sire, we shan't get drunk on it," put in Pimpernet, who had followed Louis, and now stood close to him.

"What, short of wine?" asked the Emperor, sharply.

"Parbleu, sire, there's our cellar," and the incorrigible Pimpernet pointed to the Danube.

"Send for Colonel Pradella," said Napoleon, sternly, continuing to dictate the wording of a despatch for Prince Eugene, commanding the army of Italy.

When he next looked up, the despatch was finished, and an officer stood in waiting, wearing the uniform of the Intendance Militaire. He looked very pale, and there was the scar of a recent sabre cut on his cheek.

"You received my orders to issue a bottle of wine per man daily, sir?"

"Yes, sire," stammered the officer.

"And you, sergeant, say none has been issued?"

"Ma foi, sire, I repeat the Danube has been our cellar. Every man here can tell you the same thing," replied Pimpernet.

"And this is the way my poor fellows are cared for. You draw the amount regularly from the military chest."

The unfortunate officer was very pale, he stood there a disgraced and convicted man. The Emperor's face was rigid.

"It was a mistake, sire. It shall be remedied at once," he stammered.

Napoleon waved his hand, and the provost martial laid his hand on the culprit's shoulder.

"Sire, it is my first fault," pleaded the

condemned man, who perfectly knew his fate. "Sire," and he pointed to the sabre cut on his cheek, "I gained this at Austerlitz."

Napoleon turned away.

"Captain De Brissac," he said, dwelling on the title, "here are your despatches, to be delivered within as short a delay as possible."

Louis took the packet, placed it in his sabretasche, and saluting, turned to depart.

"You will leave at break of day, sir, and make all speed possible."

"I have a wife and children, sire," urged the terrified officer of the commissariat as he was led away.

"You should have thought of them before," replied Napoleon.

The deadened report of half-a-dozen muskets came on the breeze five minutes

later, as Louis passed through the lines of the 10th Lancers, telling of the commissary's fate. Napoleon was inexorable in these matters.

"Ma foi ! I congratulate you, mon capitaine."

"And I, and I," exclaimed one after another the officers of his old regiment, as he paused by the watch-fire.

"Thank you, Bertrand. Thank you, La Pommereye," replied Louis, gaily. "Have any of you got a glass of wine to give away?"

"Here, take my flask, De Brissac," cried De La Gatinerie. "It has a tale of its own, I can tell you. And so you have despatches for the army of Italy? In seven days it may join us, and won't we sweep yonder heights to the cry of 'Vive l'Empereur !'"

"Who are you, sir? Your name?" asked a voice close by, and all sprung to their feet, for there, wearing the well-known grey coat, and his hands behind his back, stood the Emperor himself.

"You ought to know me, sire," replied the old soldier, nothing daunted, speaking in hoarse grumbling tones, as he saluted. "We fought in Egypt together. You drank from this flask when we were crossing the desert. *Sacrebleu!* You should know both it and me, sire."

Approaching the fire, Napoleon gazed into the other's face. Then turning to Massena, who followed him :

"He's right ; I do know that bronzed face, and heavy moustache. Inscribe his name for the Cross of the Legion. Are you content, old friend?" and Napoleon laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Content? Yes, sire, I am, since you have not forgotten me."

"I was at Kleber's side when he fell, and you were general, not Emperor, then," he muttered, as Napoleon moved on towards the ford crossing the Danube, to return to Schonbrunn.

"Tell us of Kleber," said Louis, as he cast himself down by the fire. "It can't be far from daybreak. He died in the moment of victory, a soldier's death."

"Aye, did he," answered La Gatinerie, drawing his cavalry cloak round him. "I was only lieutenant then. I remember the terrace where he was walking that day well. The vines grew luxuriantly over the trellis work, shading out the sun. He was talking to Protain, the architect."

"Well," said Louis, as the narrator

paused to light his pipe, puffing out clouds of tobacco smoke.

"Well, it was a fine June morning, and just as he turned in his walk, a Turk came up, apparently to present a petition. Kleber paused, stretched out his hand, and the next instant was stabbed to the heart. It was all over in three minutes. He died in my arms."

"And the assassin," asked La Pomereye, "was he taken?"

"Protain sprung on him, but received six stabs, and he, too, fell. Then it was my turn."

"And you found him?" said Louis.

"Yes, I found him hid away under a large nopal tree. He was a young man named Soleyman El Halibi, and a desperate fanatic."

"Three days later," continued La Gati-

nerie, "we buried Kleber, and even Mourad Bey's Mamelukes shed tears over the grave of one so fierce in fight, so gentle in peace."

"And what became of the assassin, Soleyman?" asked a young officer.

"Oh, I can't bear to think of that, Les-caut," replied La Gatinerie, "it was a sickening affair."

"Tiens, I'll tell it you, De Brissac, when you join again. There's day breaking." And the old soldier knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it carefully away, wrapped himself in his cloak, and was fast asleep in a moment, while Louis took his way among the various corps, to the river side, crossed in a boat, and mounting his horse, rode down the banks of the Danube, bound for Raab.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPIRIT OF THE DANUBE.

DAY broke as Louis mounted his horse, and, taking the river for his guide, fell in with regiment after regiment. Forced to halt when the bridge gave way, they had bivouacked on the spot, and the various little encampments, dotting here and there the plain, looked very picturesque. He was in high spirits as he rode along, and his mission to Prince Eugene's army was known, so that he received many a "God speed you!" while passing through the various camps. As he

left Vienna further and further behind, the road became more lonely ; but still country carts would be met with. One of these, driven by a Wallachian peasant, overtook him twice, its driver eyeing him attentively as he did so ; but Louis was too happy to notice this. Singing snatches of songs, thinking of his promotion, and of the prospects before him, he rode on in the sunshine ; though just before nightfall things altered. The river branched off into numerous streams, the banks becoming sandy and low, trending away on either side into vast plains, destitute of habitation, and almost of vegetation ; and then, to make matters worse, on the afternoon of the day after he had quitted Lobau, clouds began to gather in heavy masses, which his sailor's education told him could lead but to one solution—a

storm. He watched its progress with some interest, for his horse was nearly done up, and there was not a sign of habitation, nor a vestige of a pathway. The clouds seemed to expand, then others came sweeping up from every direction, as if a dozen different currents of air were driving them about in sport, to form a merry dance in cloud-land. Darker and darker grew the evening, and then the lightning flashed, the thunder roared, and the rain came sweeping across the plain in torrents. Louis pulled up his tired horse.

“Well, this is pleasant. I was not more fairly drenched in the Danube. That was a lucky ducking, but how will this end?” The tired horse raised his head, pricked his ears, and whinnied. “Some one coming this way,” he said to himself, unconsciously speaking aloud.

Presently a droning kind of a song reached his ears in the intervals between the thunder claps, the jingling of bells was heard, and soon a small cart came across the plain, drawn by two horses.

A stout-built, powerful man, with broad shoulders, dressed in a blouse, fastened round his waist, heavy boots of untanned leather, and a Tyrolese felt hat, pulled up to stare at the stranger.

He didn't much like the Wallachian's face, long uncombed hair, black beard and whiskers ; but there was no help for it.

"How far am I from Raab, friend?" he asked, in French.

The man cracked his long whip without speaking, and the horses' bells jingled as they moved on.

Louis tried English, but without success.

"The fellow must be going somewhere,"

he muttered. "Anything is better than this," and he touched his tired horse with the spur, and followed.

A quarter-of-an-hour later, they came suddenly on a solitary hut. Built of mud, its roof of thatch was blackened with rain and age. There was a long trough before the door, and as Louis loosened his bridle-rein, to let his horse drink, the Wallachian came out of a barn behind the house, his horses' harness thrown over his arm, cracking his whip.

It was nothing but a barn, yet there was plenty of hay and straw, and Louis littered down his horse, taking every care of it before he thought of himself, and then, reaching his pistols from the holsters, went towards the hut. It was dark now, but the storm had passed away, and a bright light was shining from the half-opened

door. He pushed it open, and entered the hut.

Right opposite, in the large fire-place, a fire was burning brightly. Straw had been thrown on the logs of wood with no niggard hand, and the greater part of a sheep was roasting, sending out a savoury perfume. A group of men were sitting at the table smoking and talking, while by the fire the Wallach, who had served him as guide, and who seemed well-known, was chatting with a girl of about eighteen.

If the man's face had displeased him before, it was even less prepossessing now. The forehead was narrow, the complexion bilious-looking, and he had a nasty trick of showing his teeth, which were long and very white. Louis could not help fancying they had met before.

The master of the house rose as he

entered, drew forth a wooden stool, and placed it near the fire, removed the pipe from his mouth, speaking some unintelligible words, and reseated himself. There was an aspect of comfort about the place which the outside had not promised, and it was evident his second ducking had ended well. The walls had been freshly white-washed, and were ornamented with pictures representing scenes from the Bible, a large Madonna occupying the place of honour. The men were ordinary peasants, wearing a kind of linen shirt, with wide sleeves, a pair of long linen trousers, large and loose like a sailor's, but slashed into a fringe where they fell over the foot. On their shoulders hung the sheepskin, of which the English hussar jacket is the model, and which serves the Hungarian peasant not only as a garment, but as bed.

"A rough set," thought Louis, as he seated himself near the fire, wringing the wet from his hair. "If I could only speak to them! I'll try the girl; she is very pretty."

And so she was, with her rosy cheeks and large brown eyes, which danced with fun as she shook her head in reply to the young officer's question.

She was the daughter of the owner. The blue petticoat showed a pair of slender ankles, and feet cased in red boots; the corsage, blue also, open in front, revealed a scrupulously white chemise. A handkerchief of brilliant colours, in which orange predominated, covered the shoulders and throat, while the national rekli, or loose jacket, completed the costume.

"She can't be married," said Louis to himself, "or that long silky hair of hers

would be covered with a cap. I know enough of Hungarian costume for that. If I could only talk to her! *Cospetto!*" he exclaimed aloud, in his vexation.

The Wallach turned suddenly.

"Almost all my countrymen speak Italian," he said, using that language, and that too with great purity. "Our host there, as well as myself. *Lednitz*, here," and he pointed to the girl, "doesn't."

"I want something to eat, friend, and a place to sleep in," said Louis, greatly relieved; "I can have both here, I fancy?"

"Of course," replied the Wallach, speaking some words to the girl, who in reply laughed, looked at Louis, and nodded her head, speaking volubly.

The proprietor rose.

"This," said he, pointing round the room, "is my property; it is at your ser-

vice. That is my daughter, Lednitz. You are welcome," and he reseated himself with dignity.

"Do you know the country, that you ride along the Danube's banks alone?" observed the Wallach.

"I never was here before. Ask how long it will be before I can get something to eat, friend."

"Do you know that for miles round the country is a shaking bog—a quagmire? Where are you going?" persisted the Wallach.

"To Raab, with despatches," answered Louis, frankly. "Can you guide me? See, I can pay," he continued, showing half-a-dozen gold Napoleons.

"No, I am bound to Comorn. The French outposts are not many miles away, but broken parties of the Archduke's

cavalry scour the plains. Mind, I have warned you!"

Louis laughed, touching the butt of his pistols in reply, and the girl Lednitz seemed to understand what was said, as she gazed at the young officer.

"Aye," struck in the owner, "but there are other dangers than that. Did you ever hear of the terrible Wassermann of the Danube, young soldier?"

"No, never. What's he got to do with me?"

"If you had continued on your way, young Frenchman, your body would have been in the river by morning, and your soul would have been his," replied the man, speaking in mysterious tones, and crossing himself.

Mutton roasted before the fire, sourcrout and the red wine of Hungary. The

pretty little red-booted lass laughed, and rubbed her hands as she heaped the juicy meat on his plate. Then fresh logs were thrown on the fire, the peasants rolled themselves in their furs, and were soon fast asleep ; and a fresh bottle of wine was placed on the table. Drawing the packet of despatches from his sabretasche, Louis placed them in his bosom, the Wallach's eyes following him as he did so.

"Well, but what about this terrible Wassermann?" he asked as he lit a cheeroot.

"You may laugh," answered the Wallach, "but he"—pointing with the stem of his pipe to the host—"he has seen him."

"See him! any one may see him on a fine spring evening, when the setting sun is tinging the Danube with gold. Lednitz, child, pour out the wine, and I'll tell

what thy grandfather saw. The Danube, you must know, stranger, rolls its waters here over a bed of golden sand, and deep beneath the waves rises the palace of the river spirit."

"What's he like?" asked the Wallach, whose pipe was glowing redly in a corner near the fire.

"A little deformed dwarf, with long sharp teeth like yours, but coral; and beautiful shells adorn the palace," continued the host—"the green water weeds float all round, concealing it from view, and the beautiful nixies of the Danube haunt it. There, on a bed of ivory, lies the spirit dwarf, waiting for the souls of those drowned in his river."

"Ma foi, he must have had busy work the day the bridge of Lobau was carried away," interrupted Louis.

The Wallach was smoking, his eyes moving from one to another as they spoke. Lednitz was sitting with some knitting on her knee, her looks fixed on her father. The peasants gave unmistakable tokens of deep sleep, and the sounds blended with the moan of the wind outside.

“Well,” continued the host, glancing round his property, “this was my father’s then, as it is mine now. He was a fisherman, and met the spirit so often they got to like one another, and one day it asked him to pay him a visit.”

“And did he?” said Louis, interested in the tale.

“He was a bold man, my father, and down he went with the spirit to the sandy bed of the Danube, and there he walked through the splendid rooms, and saw the great ivory bed, and a number of bottles,

which the spirit told him held the souls of the drowned."

"Ah, I see now. So you thought I should have made his acquaintance if I had ridden on."

The Wallach nodded solemnly through the cloud of smoke surrounding him.

"Well, my father could not get these captive souls out of his head, and as he became more and more familiar with the spirit he tried to persuade the dwarf to let them go, but he only laughed, cocked his little green cap, with its feather of the same colour, jauntily on one side, winked his wicked little eyes, and showed his sharp teeth.

"Lednitz, fetch another bottle of Marco brunner—and be quick, girl."

"Well, my father," continued the host, as he filled the horn drinking cups, "said

his prayers, asked the Madonna there to help him, and boldly plunged into the river. The Virgin heard him, and besides he knew well when the mischievous little sprite would be away looking for souls, and you may be sure he chose that time. He reached the palace, found the room, uncorked the bottles, and let the souls out."

"And did he ever see the spirit again?"

"One evening he was throwing his nets. He heard near him the sweetest female voice he had ever listened to; and when he looked, there on the sand sat a beautiful woman. She was combing out her long hair, and as she did so sang so sweetly that my father left off rowing and listened. Suddenly, as his boat floated down stream, he remembered the nixies

of the Danube, and knew that whoever listened to the nixies' song would be fascinated, and finish by plunging into the river after her. What did he care, he could die with that delicious melody in his ears. Then the Madonna interfered, and brought to his remembrance the dwarf with his malignant eyes and gleaming teeth. Suddenly it flashed on my father that the nixie had been sent to lure him to his doom, that his soul might replace those he had freed. With a tremendous effort he closed his eyes, made the sign of the cross, and prayed to be strengthened against the nixies' wiles. A wild scream rang in his ears, a splash in the water, and when he looked again the moon was lighting up the Danube's banks, and he was alone.

"My father was a wise, as well as a

bold man. He rowed home, sold his boats and nets, nor did he ever trust himself on the river again.

"And now we are early folks, Signor Officer," said the host, breaking the silence which had ensued as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "and if it pleases you Lednitz will show you your room."

The girl rose at a sign from her father, and, nothing loath, Louis took up his sword.

"Thank you for your tale," he said as he followed her. "Good night and à rivederla."

CHAPTER III.

“PARTANT POUR LA SYRIE.”

A SMALL, very small room, more like a closet indeed, with one crazy window, looking on the barn behind. The floor of beaten earth, the walls of the same material, but carefully whitewashed. In one corner, a bed of fresh, sweet-smelling hay, covered with a coarse, clean, linen-sheet. A heap of sheep-skins lay at the foot.

Muttering some words, which he did not understand, Lednitz stuck the splinter of pine-wood, which served as a candle,

into a crack in the wall, then came up to Louis, took his hand, and spoke long and earnestly, looking up into his face.

He laughed, for he did not understand a word, but he stooping pressed his lips on the girl's forehead. As he did so, he noticed the tears stood in her eyes.

"It's very annoying," he said, speaking in Italian, and very slowly.

Lednitz evidently understood him, but could not reply, for she stamped her little red-booted foot in vexation. Then she raised herself on tip-toe, and touched his breast where the packet lay hid.

Louis nodded and smiled. "Never fear, Lednitz, I'll guard that with my life."

The girl seemed pleased. Running to the door, she opened it, and, placing her hand where the lock should be, appeared

to point out that it had been removed lately.

Again he nodded. "I understand," he said; "all right, Lednitz."

But the girl was not satisfied. Coming up to him once more, she began speaking volubly in her own tongue, when suddenly a loud voice was heard calling to her. A look of terror crossed her face, as she laid her hand on his own, and looked at him earnestly, once more pointing to the door.

"Lednitz—Lednitz!" came the angry call.

The noise of footsteps was heard in the corridor, and as the girl flew out of the room, she met her father in the passage, and Louis heard tones of rough chiding, he almost thought the sound of a blow.

Taking the pine-splinter, he narrowly examined the room. The window, he satis-

fied himself, could not be opened, and gave into the stable-yard. The door as evidently could not be locked, so he pushed the only piece of furniture the room contained, a stool, against it, kicked off his long riding-boots, wrapped up his despatches in one of the sheep-skins, which he made his pillow, placed his sword and pistols ready to his hand, and then threw himself on the bed. He had determined to keep awake, and there was plenty of light, for the storm had cleared the air, and the moon, though only in her first quarter, had risen. He began thinking of himself, of his singular position, known to no other except Napoleon. He congratulated himself on his wisdom in choosing the freedom of a soldier's life. How well things had turned for him. The Empress Ida's friend, and Napoleon—well, he did not know so much about him—who

did?—but the packet which he could feel under his head would bring on a general engagement. Yes, he would keep awake, and defend it with his life if necessary. He had scarcely formed the resolution, when weariness and fatigue claimed their own, and he slept soundly.

Hours passed, and he slept on. A noise awoke him. It was either the shutting of a door, or the horses kicking in the stable, he thought. Then came steps, and a low whispering in the passage. This was what Lednitz had warned him of. A creaking noise as the door met the resistance of the stool. My pistols are ready, I will feign sleep, he thought; I am more than a match for the robbers, but what a fool I was to show the gold.

His eyes all but closed, his breathing regular and heavy, Louis waited. A hand

and arm pushed the stool gently aside, and the door stood ajar. First the Wallach slipped in, then the host, and one after another the three peasants, until the whole party stood by the bed-side. The Wallach stooped over him, he could feel the hot breath on his check—he could feel the long fingers, too, under his jacket, fumbling for the papers. It was not money, it was the despatches, then, they wanted. The agony of that moment was all but intolerable, but still the hard lump under his head told that the Emperor's despatches were safe. Something was found though.

They had left the bed-side now, and were grouped near the window, examining by the light of the moon a packet of letters. They were those he had received from Ida, while at the military college, and might deceive the men.

No, that was impossible. A flower, a withered camelia, dropped from them, and the Wallach was too wily not to have his eyes opened at once. He dropped the letters with a heavy curse, as he came to the signature. His eye caught the rolled sheepskin. Uttering a deep oath, he drew his dagger, but the inn-keeper grasped his arm, listening attentively.

The far-away sound of a man's voice singing, came faintly at first, then ringing out clearly and more distinctly. Louis' heart beat wildly.

*"Partant pour la Syrie,
Le jeune et beau Dunois
Allait prier Marie,
De bénir ses exploits."*

The Wallach turned.

"It is but one man," he muttered, "who cares!"

But help was near, and Louis was too well inured to danger to hesitate. With one bound he sprang to his feet, the little room was filled with smoke as the pistol-shot rang out, and the Wallachian stood for a moment erect, then, uttering a deep groan, fell heavily stone dead.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs, the noise of breaking glass and splintering wood, as the window was dashed in, and a man, dressed in the uniform of Murat's Hussars, dashed into the room.

"Louis De Brissac, by Jové," exclaimed St. Ybars. "Shall I pistol this fellow, mon vieux? Who the devil are you, sir?" he asked, without waiting for a reply.

The Hungarian looked firm and com-

posed, but the three peasants had disappeared, and at this moment Lednitz came dashing along the passage, throwing herself, with a scream of terror, into her father's arms.

"Spare him!" she cried, in her own tongue. "Remember we are Hungarians. You should not have shown your papers to him of all men," and she pointed to the dead man.

St. Ybars was struck with the girl's beauty.

"Well," he said, as he lowered his pistol, "you might leave a fellow's wife alone while on important duty at least. This is the husband, I suppose," and the hussar touched the dead man with his foot.

"He would have been," said the Hungarian gruffly. "Poor Pepito."

"Pepito," exclaimed St. Ybars. "Here,

Louis, help me. This has been a well-laid plot."

They turned the dead man on his back, and ghastly enough he looked, with the blood oozing from a round hole in his forehead.

"Pepito, sure enough," said St. Ybars, as he stood looking at the dead man. "Why, you had a narrow escape. It is the Neapolitan Count Thurn, the friend of the Archduke, the most zealous mouchard of the Austrian and Neapolitan Court. He must have followed you step by step."

"He did. I remember all," said Louis. "And now, take her away, sir," he continued, speaking to the Hungarian. "Let this be a lesson to you."

Lednitz was sobbing hysterically, as he raised the frightened girl, soothing her as

best he could. He led her away, placed her in a chair in the room they had occupied over night, once more pressed his lips on her forehead, placing on the table all his pocket contained of gold, and then the two officers, glad to get away from the place, were soon on their way to Raab.

"Morning can't be far off. I think I see a streak of grey away yonder. By the way, I shan't forget that song of yours in a hurry," said Louis, after some minutes' silence, broken only by the trot of their horses.

His companion laughed.

"How a campaign has changed you!" he replied. "I should not know you for the same young fellow I saw at Malmaison. Yes, that's daylight yonder. Do you know I'm a great fool?"

"After the little scene under the Clovis

oak at the place you have just named, you'll excuse me agreeing with you, St. Ybars."

"Ah, well, but what had I to do interfering yonder? I ought to have let you be stuck like a pig."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"But it's not nonsense, mon brave. I asked a lady you know to marry me, and I think she would if it had not been for you."

"Asked Ida Caraccioli to marry you!"

"Yes, not once, but twice; and would a third time, if that Neapolitan scoundrel had done me the favour of killing you."

Louis was silent.

"Why it would have read like a romance. I should have found you killed, recovered your despatches, been mentioned

in general orders, and sent to Paris to marry. What chance have I now you've shot that scoundrel Thurn through the head—the most noted spy in the country, the very man who condemned her uncle to be hanged at the yard-arm of his frigate, the *Minerva*."

Louis reddened to the roots of his hair.

"I'd sooner have done that than have carried the heights of Essling the other day!" he said.

"Well, I was refused, and promised to be on good terms with you. We are to be Castor and Pollux, and I've begun by showing you the way to Raab. Yonder village which you see above the pine wood is Altenberg. You will find Bernadotte's Saxons there. Good-bye, now."

"Stay, St. Ybars. What takes you to Vienna?"

“To ask for orders for the army of Italy,” replied the hussar.

“Of which orders I am the bearer. The army of Italy is to join head-quarters. This junction effected, we shall sweep the Archduke from the land.”

“Bravo! Vive l’Empereur!” cried St. Ybars, turning his horse’s head once more. “Come along, we will be at Altenberg in an hour!”

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCE EUGENE.

“**S**TAY, St. Ybars; I have twice seen the gleam of arms from yonder wood,” remarked Louis, as the horses trotted merrily along the road leading to the village of Altenberg.

“Oh! Bernadotte’s outposts are close by. I know every inch of the road,” replied the careless hussar.

It was broad daylight now. The houses of the village might be a mile distant, and just at that moment a troop of well-mounted men debouched from them.

“That’s a general officer at their head,” said Henri, shading his eyes from the slanting rays of the sun. “Perhaps Bernadotte himself.”

Hardly had he spoken, when a regiment of hussars drew out of the wood, the sun glinting on their arms and accoutrements. For a moment they seemed to pause, then, led by an officer mounted on a black horse, and wearing the magnificent uniform of the Hungarian hussars, they rode at the French, their pace increasing at every stride.

“By Jove! they are two to one,” shouted St. Ybars, touching his horse with the spur, as a wild cheer burst from the Hungarians.

“How magnificently that fellow rides,” said Louis, as his horse broke into a gallop.

“Yes, and I want a second charger—

that one will just suit me. Forward ! and Vive l'Empereur !”

The French and Hungarians had closed in, a cloud of dust lay before them, out of which came the shouts of the combatants, and the occasional gleam of steel. A masterless horse dashed past, dragging a wounded dragoon along, his foot fast in the stirrup, and his head smashed to pieces.

“One of De Sahuc’s fellows,” muttered the hussar. “Forward !”

The reports of the pistols were heard, not seen, so dense was the dust-cloud, as the two, their swords drawn, their horses well in hand, went forward at the gallop. The French were evidently in a trap, surrounded by a picked regiment of the Archduke John’s hussars.

St. Ybars dashed headlong into the

melée. "Leave him to me, Latinville!" he shouted, as with a sweep of his sabre he emptied one of the Austrian saddles, and rode furiously at the leader of the troop.

Just on the outskirts of the affray, as Louis came up, a tall powerful man, in the uniform of a general officer, was fighting desperately, sorely beset by three Hungarians. His grey charger was already wounded, but he managed it splendidly; the plumed hat was gone, and his sword already reddened.

"Vive l'Empereur!" shouted Louis, as he discharged his pistol full in the face of one of the assailants, and then dashed at the second, sword in hand. The Austrians were staggered by the unexpected reinforcement, the numbers of which they naturally exaggerated, and soon, to add to their confusion, from the houses of Alten-

berg came the ring of the French trumpets. St. Ybars, however, found himself fairly matched. So far from winning the coveted charger, his own had gone down, from a chance pistol shot. A second more, and the Hungarian's curved sabre would have done its work, when a blow from the pommel of a sword knocked the hussar colonel clean out of his saddle.

"Thanks, De Brissac!" cried St. Ybars, as he gripped his half-stunned antagonist by the throat, and the two rolled over and over in the death struggle.

The steady gallop of Pacthod's dragoons could be heard, and their gallant war-cry of "*Vive l'Empereur*" rang out. The Hungarians broke, but were vigorously pursued, and but few returned to tell their tale of how nearly Eugene Beauharnais had been a prisoner; while, soiled with dirt

and dust, Henri St. Ybars patted the neck of the black charger.

“He ought to be yours by rights, De Brissac, but I can’t spare him, *mon vieux*,” he said, as he lengthened the stirrups, and swung himself into the saddle. “I’ll tell you what, Latinville, I’ll leave you to fight your own battles next time.”

“All right, Henri,” replied the officer addressed, a handsome young aide. “Prince Eugène wishes to see you, Captain de Brissac.”

Under a tree, surrounded by several general officers, his plumed hat and drawn sword lying on the grass by his side, sat Eugene Beauharnais, wiping the perspiration from his brow. A dismounted dragoon was walking the grey charger to and fro, and a score of Pacthod’s heavies were sitting motionless in their saddles beside by.

"Send a squadron or two of your fellows, General Packthod, to scour yonder wood. Not hurt, I hope, Latinville?" said Eugene.

The aide laughed.

"No, Prince, thanks to St. Ybars and his mad-cap nature, which relieved me just as I was getting my soup too hot."

"I was sorely beset, De Sahuc," continued Eugene, addressing a cavalry officer by his side; "and I have to thank you, sir," he added, turning to De Brissac, "for that ready aid one brave man willingly gives another."

"I am the bearer of despatches, Prince, direct from the Emperor. They are of an urgent nature," replied Louis, heartily glad to be rid of his charge.

Prince Eugene tore open the envelope. Napoleon's orders were precise, and there

was not a moment to lose. The army of Italy must take its place in line by the fourth of July, and its different divisions were much scattered.

Eugene Beauharnais sprang to his feet.

"You will break up your lines on the Raab instantly, General Pacthod," he said, speaking rapidly. "You will march by Zant Peter and Vedenaz ; De Sahuc, you will do the same, without a moment's delay. Gentlemen, the Emperor needs us."

"Vive l'Empereur !" was the reply, as the two generals mounted ; and, followed by their staff, dashed off at the gallop. The dragoons fell in, the staff mounted, and the busy aides rode off in every direction. "The Emperor needs us !" were magical words.

Prince Eugene mounted.

“ You will keep near me, Monsieur De Brissac,” he said. A cloud of dust, the jingle of accoutrements, and General Montbrun dashed up, saluting as he checked his horse, by Beauharnais’s side.

“ Ha ! Montbrun, you will remain at Acs, evacuating only under cover of night. General Grenier, you will break ground at once, following the road to Hederver,” continued the Prince, giving his various orders with precision and rapidity.

“ Latinville, break up my head-quarters ; I shall not return. General Baraguay d’Hilliers, leave the 112th of the line to hold Altenberg, and let me hear your bugles sound the advance within half-an-hour. And gentlemen,” continued the Prince as he rode down the main street of Altenberg, raising his plumed hat as he spoke ; “ remember the Em-

peror needs us. I know no further word is necessary."

"There goes my breakfast," grumbled St. Ybars, as Latinville dashed away in the direction of Raab.

"Monsieur De Brissac," said Prince Eugene, as he dismounted in front of General Baraguay d'Hilliers' head-quarters; "you will do me the favour of breakfasting with me, and then ride at once for Presbourg. Tell General Sevenarola to hold his position at all hazards, but to detach two battalions of the third Italian brigade, to garrison Raab."

The trumpets and bugles rang merrily along the lines, infantry, cavalry, artillery, and baggage-waggons began to move with a celerity only known to old and practised troops, and on the evening of the 4th of July the army of Italy arrived at Schwächat, and

under cover of the night passed the bridge, bivouacking on the island of Lobau ; the brigades of Davoust, Oudinot, and Massena having evacuated it previously for their positions on the plains of Marchfeld.

Massed in close columns of regiments, the various divisions of the army of Italy halted as soon as they had gained their place in the French line. Officers were ordered to the front, and then followed by a strong peloton of the Chasseurs of the Guard, the Emperor rode along their ranks. His stern glance marked their tattered eagles and soiled uniforms, as he drew bridle in the centre of the troops. He ran his eye along the glittering and compact mass of sabres and bayonets. The drums, bugles, and trumpets, rang out, then died away.

"Soldiers of the army of Italy," burst from his lips, as he raised his hat, "you are

welcome, you have kept faith with me. You have fought and won the battles of the Piave, St. Daniel, Jarvis, and Goritz. You have carried by assault the strong posts of Malborghetto, and of Pradella. The enemies' forces entrenched at Brewald, and Laybach, have capitulated to you. Before passing the Drave, twenty-five thousand men, sixty guns, and ten colours, were the trophies of your valour.

"Since that," continued Napoleon, "the Drave, the Saave, the Muer, have not been able to stay your advance; while the Austrians under Jellachich, the very men who gave the signal for the massacres of the Tyrol, have fallen under, or fled before your bayonets.

"Soldiers, that Austrian army, which lay like a blot on my provinces, whose leaders boasted they would break my



crown of iron, thanks to your courage beaten, broken-up, dispersed, are a proof of the truth of the motto : 'Dio la me diedi, guoi a chi la tocca.' 'God gave it me, death to him who touches it.' Soldiers of the army of Italy, forward."

And with these spirit-stirring words ringing in their ears, Beauharnais' columns passed on. Massena's divisions inclining to the right, Davoust and Oudinot's making a similar movement to the left, Prince Eugene's victorious troops filling up the gap, while Archduke John of Austria, wholly deceived, lay with his forces shut up in Presbourg, in complete inactivity.

CHAPTER V.

WAGRAM.

THE night of the 5th of July was far advanced, when Louis De Brissac, on his return from Presbourg, rode over the bridge, leading from Lobau to the plains of Marchfield.

General Sevenarola had detained him, and hard as he had pressed his horse, it was past midnight when he reached the tête du pont. All day he had heard the boom of the guns, hollow and indistinct at first, coming in heavy thuds at intervals, but, towards afternoon, settling into one

dull prolonged roar, which chafed him terribly, for it told him of a great battle being fought, at which he could not be present. Towards nightfall the artillery fire died away, the watch-fires blazed up before him by hundreds, and he learned from stragglers that the action had been undecided, both sides having suffered terribly.

Prince Eugene had, he too found, occupied the centre of the line, the Austrian brigades of Hohenzollern, Rosenberg, and Bellegarde opposed to him, and to this point he took his way.

It was no easy task to find among the different regiments, but after going wrong several times, he came to a small stream, called the Rosshach. It was not deep, and he was told to follow it. Soon he found himself in the lines of De Sahuc's cavalry brigade.

A fire was burning, and a score of officers were grouped around it, who were making the most of some stale bread and tough beef, washed down with Hungarian wine, several bottles of which were lying about.

"I've seen him harder set than this," observed one. Louis recognised the speaker at once.

"Hallo ! De La Gatinerie," he called, checking his horse ; "where are the Prince's quarters ?"

"Deuced glad to see you back, mon vieux," answered the dragoon, while St. Ybars, jumping to his feet, came forward.

"The Prince is with the Emperor," said Henri, grasping his hand ; "but here's his secretary Lacombe, and so it's the same thing. You can give up your papers to him and join us.'

"How has the day gone?" he asked, anxiously, as he dismounted and gave up his horse to an orderly.

"We carried the heights of Wagram, with the help of Oudinot's grenadiers and Lamarque's infantry. Here, help yourself, *mon vieux*?"

Louis was soon enjoying the coarse fare as much as any of them. "Well?" he asked.

"Oh! the whole is soon told. The Archduke drew off the Yach and Colleredo regiments who had been opposed to Massena, and gathering together several battalions from Neusidel and Baumendorf, hurled them in one compact mass on Lamarque's division.

"It was Bernadotte's Saxons first gave way," said Du Pitré. "The fire was just awful."

“Well, Davoust’s corps was not long after them, Du Pitré; and, to cut a long tale short,” remarked De La Gatinerie, “we are just where we began, and to-morrow—I should say to-day—must settle matters. I repeat I’ve seen the Petit Caporal in a greater fix than this.”

The night was dark and starless. Few slept in the French camp that night, and all were anxiously awaiting the dawn.

“I say, De La Gatinerie, you promised when last we parted to tell the tale of Soleyman’s fate. I mean the fellow who killed Kleber.”

“I don’t much like to think of it, but give me time to light my pipe, and I’ll try,” replied the cavalry officer. “It has been a hard day’s work to-day for the infantry, but our fellows have not done much.

"Soleyman had three accomplices, and their heads were struck off in the great square before his face. None of you fellows would believe it, but he took no more notice of it than if his eyes were shut, but his turn came then," and the speaker paused, and seemed to hesitate.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, "it was a sickening sight. Bartolemeo Serra, the chief of the Mamelukes, presided over the execution, and seemed to enjoy seeing the poor devil's hand burned off slowly with a red-hot iron."

"How did he bear it?" asked Du Pitré.

"He never winced, until a lump of burning coal was dropped on his arm by accident.

"What!" asked the Mameluke, 'you,

who have borne so much, to fear slight pain !

“ ‘ That burn was not part of my punishment. Do your duty, but no more,’ replied Soleyman.

“ Well, they impaled the poor wretch after, and so skilfully was it done that he lived for four hours.”

“ Bah ! why didn’t some of you finish him with a pistol shot ?” said St. Ybars.
“ It’s sickening !”

“ He would have lived much longer,” replied De La Gatinerie, “ but I passed the spot on duty.

“ ‘ Water, water !’ groaned the poor wretch as he writhed on the stake. Now to give him drink, was to give him death, and it was forbidden. I could not stand it, so I gave it, and he, in return, drank, cursed me, and died.”

"Ah! I was in General Belliard's brigade then," remarked an artillery officer, raising his head from the ground where he had been lying. "The English disembarked twenty-five thousand men, and shut us up in Cairo."

"Parbleu, it's not the English we feared," growled De La Gatinerie. "The plague decimated us. We had only fifteen days' rations left, and hardly any ammunition. *Que voulez-vous?* we capitulated. It was the fortune of war."

"Well, Lacombe, any news?" he asked, as the Prince's secretary came up.

"Not for you. Monsieur De Brissac, you are to attach yourself to General Macdonald's staff. These are your orders."

"Bravo! we shall have you with us tomorrow, and there will be saddles emptied," cried St. Ybars.

"Hold your noise, Henri!" exclaimed De La Gatinerie, as he removed his helmet. "I lost the oldest friend I had in that charge to-day, the only one we made, by the way. Poor Ernest, he went down horse and man by my side. I shall never see him again."

"Well, if he is dead, I suppose you don't want," replied Louis, laughing.

"I don't know," answered the dragoon, gloomily, "we made a compact, that if there is a life after this, which I don't believe, whoever died first should tell the other."

"Lord, help us, you'll frighten us into fits with your ghosts if you bring them here," exclaimed Lesage, a lieutenant in Nansouty's cuirassiers, whose freshly scarred face told of his late acquaintance with the Austrian sabres.

"A soldier should not fear anything," replied the dragoon, dictatorially.

"Except what is supernatural," added Louis.

"Not even that," persisted La Gatinerie.

"Fear should be unknown to him."

"I'll bet you a champagne dinner at the Rocher for all present who get back to the Boulevards, that if Ernest Duval keeps his promise you'll be frightened," said St. Ybars, laughing.

"Done," replied the dragoon, gravely. "How came your fellows to arrive so late, Lacombe?"

"The order to break up our quarters was only received on the 1st of July. We were at Gratz," replied the officer addressed. "The division marched one hundred and sixteen miles in three days."

"Aye!" added Major Musnier of the

84th, "and our fellows had only quarter rations of bread. It was impossible to procure any on the Bruck road, and even now my regiment and the 84th can't pass the bridges, so blocked up are they with Nansouty's fellows, and Lauriston's artillery."

"No fear of the bridges being carried away this time," remarked Du Pitré, "they are strongly protected by stockades. There's daylight."

There was indeed a faint streak of grey light in the east, but instantly the far away sound of the bugles was heard from the Austrian lines, rising on the air.

Regiment after regiment took it up. Men sprang to their feet by thousands, hoarse words of command flew along the various divisions, the drums rattled in one long roll, the trumpets joined in, and

as daylight grew more and more distinct, the two hostile armies could be seen fronting each other.

The Austrian Archduke had weakened his centre, to strengthen his wings. Napoleon's quick eye at once detected the mistake. This was to win him the battle, and he and Prince Eugene had spent the night in massing troops before Wagram, where Lannes' death was to be avenged.

The Austrian columns lay behind their entrenchments, which stretched from Gros Aspern to the village of Engersdorf, traversing Essling. Their right rested on the Danube, their left on Markgrafen Neusidel, the small river Rossbach running in their front. One hundred and eighty thousand men, with nine hundred guns, led by the Archduke in person.

Massena commanded the French left,

Prince Eugene with Macdonald the centre, and Davoust the right, the line extending at least six miles. In the rear lay the Danube, while at Vienna, the house-tops, the church spires, every available post, was crowded by the anxious population, assisting at the unusual spectacle of a great battle fought under their eyes. In the churches the priests were performing mass, praying earnestly for the success of the Archduke.

Suddenly, as the light grew stronger, a single gun was heard from the Austrian centre, and then the roar of the artillery burst out, as the brigades of Bellegarde, Lichtenstein, and Rosenberg, attacked Davoust's position. For two hours the battle swayed to and fro, then, gradually, the French drove the Austrians back on Neusidel, while the Archduke, massing

thirty-five thousand men, hurled them on Massena, who commanded the left wing, driving him back, and sending General Boudet's brigade flying into the island of Lobau, and even through the streets of Vienna. For nearly six hours charge succeeded charge. The village Aspern, which Massena had carried, was lost again. Wagram, Essling, and Neusidel, were in flames.

"General Broussier's division will change front to the right!" cried Macdonald. "Captain De Brissac, this for the general."

The French were swarming thickly round the tower of Neusidel now.

"Morand and Friant's division to carry Wagram, at all risks, with the bayonet," were the pencilled orders Louis De Brissac bore, as he pushed his wearied charger to the gallop, pulling up at the general's side.

“The 91st and 84th regiments to form line, and push forward with the bayonet,” his verbal directions.

The Austrian guns had been keeping up a plunging fire on Broussier's brigade, which formed part of Macdonald's division. Right opposite, the two flanks pushed forward, so as to form a kind of crescent; the Austrian line was drawn up, while the concentrated fire from sixty field-pieces swept the ground on which the regiments, by Macdonald's orders, now deployed into line.

Followed by a brilliant staff, and the usual peloton of chasseurs à cheval, a single horseman came on at the gallop, drawing up his horse on the left of the line.

“General,” said Napoleon, “your division has covered itself with glory. Be-

fore you lies the key of the Austrian position ; in half an hour it must be mine !”

“ For God’s sake, sire, keep in rear of the column !” cried Broussier, for the cannon balls were flying like hail round him.

Colonel Gallet and Major Barras fell, in a vain attempt to surround the Emperor and lead him away. Lacombe was down, almost every mounted officer was wounded, while, just at that moment, the Saxons and Bavarians gave way. The French left was overpowered, and the mass of fugitives poured over the bridge into the island of Lobau, and away through the streets of Vienna. The field of Wagram seemed lost.

“ Sire !” exclaimed an aide, whose broken sword and torn uniform told its own tale, “ General Boudet’s brigade has given way, his guns are lost !”

The Emperor answered not a word. His glass was fixed on Neusidel, from whose wrecked houses the red flashes of the Austrian artillery were darting thick and fast, like fiery tongues flaming amidst the smoke.

Suddenly he closed the glass with a snap.

“Charge, Macdonald. Forward, and the day is ours,” he exclaimed, as he put spurs to his horse, and rode away.

Up the slopes moved eight battalions, the flower of Lamarque’s and Broussier’s infantry. On the right flank four regiments of Nausouty’s cuirassiers ; on the left General De Wrede with thirty guns, De Sahuc’s cavalry, and the Polish light horse, while the thunder of Lauriston’s artillery was heard, as one hundred guns opened on the Austrian centre,

silencing their fire. But Lichtenstein and Klenaus' divisions lay in front, and at first the French line bent and wavered, as the Austrian volleys swept them down. The next moment the bayonet did its work, and the Austrian infantry was doubled up and crushed, while along the whole line rang the shout of "Vive l'Empereur!" as the advance was ordered, and Massena, Davoust, Oudinot, moved forward their divisions as one man.

"Vive l'Empereur! Cavalry to the front!" shouted Louis, as he joined De Sahuc's division, and soon the bright sabres of St. Ybars' Hussars and the Polish Lancers were at work in the streets of Wagram, while the Austrian army fled along the road to Znaym. Nothing could stop the French now. Sassenbrun was carried by assault, while Geransdorf, with its en-

trenched and crenellated houses checked but for a time the French advance, doing the Archduke's rear-guard good service. The voltigeurs and grenadiers dashed at it, but the column literally melted away before the concentrated fire. The men, struck down in long files, broke and fell back.

"I say, St. Ybars," cried Louis, as the hussars topped the rise. "See yonder farm-house," and he pointed with his sword to a building protected by a wall evidently crumbling before the heavy fire.

"Why, we can ride in four deep. Come along. A glorious death, or the Cross of the Legion," he added, breathlessly.

A wild cheer broke from Brennier's voltigeurs, as the hussars made their rush.

The Austrians hesitated for a moment.

“Vive l’Empereur !” shouted Louis, as his horse rose at the wall, and next moment a hand to hand *melée* was going on in the streets of Geransdorf, while, encouraged by the charge, Pacthod’s and Durutte’s infantry poured into the place.

“Down men, down !” cried an officer of voltigeurs, as the Austrian artillery unlimbered, and opened up the street.

“Steady, lads, au galop !” and the hussars dashed on. Then came a wild rally, over which rang the cry of “Vive l’Empereur !”

The Austrians were cut down at their guns, the pieces captured, and Geransdorf was won.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEAD DRAGOON.

“WELL, they haven’t improved your beauty,” said La Gatinerie, laughing, as De Sahuc’s cavalry fell in the following morning.

“It was one of Lichtenstein’s grenadiers,” replied St. Ybars, putting his hand to his forehead, which was all covered with strips of plaster. “My horse fell at the wall, and the fellow struck at my head with the butt end of his musket.”

“You must have a thick skull to stand that.”

“The blow was partly warded off by my arm, and so the beggar was just going to try the bayonet. You must ask De Brissac there for the rest.”

“A frightful list of dead and wounded,” remarked Colonel Nagle. “Five hundred and ninety killed, one hundred and eighty amputations, and one thousand five hundred and six wounded, in our brigade alone.”

“It is reported the Archduke himself is hurt,” said Louis.

“Aye, and I heard Macdonald say that three Austrian marshals and one major-general have been found on the field,” said the colonel.

“A glorious affair, my lads,” cried Du Pitré, as he rode up. “Ten colours, forty guns, eighteen thousand prisoners, and thirteen thousand killed and wounded.”

“General De Sahuc’s cavalry to fall in at once in rear of Broussier’s division,” called an aide as he rode past.

“See, St. Ybars, there’s Macdonald,” observed Louis, as, obeying his orders, he rode away to join the staff.

The army of Italy remained halted, covering the road to Vienna. The Emperor had allowed the Austrian army no breathing time. The French artillery were pounding at their rear; the cuirassiers and hussars sabring right and left; the Lancers of Berg and the cavalry of the guard were committing great havoc, strewing the broad road to Znaym with dead, while the artillery, opening at point-blank range, mowed down by ranks the mobbed regiments.

Whenever a village was reached the Austrian rear would make a stand, and

Lichtenstein's Dragoons dash forward at a gallop, though certain of defeat and death, checking the pursuit for a moment. The village of Sassenbrun was thus held, and between that and the river Thaya the fortified post of Nicolsberg, strongly garrisoned by the flower of the Austrian army, lay before the French.

The sun was shining brightly, and brigade after brigade, cavalry, infantry, and artillery, passed onwards, cheering the army of Italy as they moved rapidly past to the front.

"There come the Grenadiers of the Guard," cried De La Gatinerie, who sat his horse at the head of his dragoons, his sword resting on his pistol holsters, as Dorseune's magnificent regiments of grenadiers came marching on, with firm steady stamp.

A distant shout, running along from corps to corps, the jingle of accoutrements, and Napoleon, followed by the Chasseurs of the Guard, topped the rise, surrounded by a brilliant staff. His face was pale, his eyes bright and piercing, as they glanced over regiments and divisions, while a look of triumph and stern determination marked his features. Right in the centre, the Emperor pulled up his horse. Letting fall his bridle rein, he thrust his hand into the bosom of his long grey coat.

"Soldiers," he said, "I am content, and thank you. You have proved yourselves worthy of France. You have covered yourselves and your country with glory. Mes enfants, in the name of France I thank you."

Napoleon raised his hat, and sat his horse bare-headed.

“Vive l’Empereur!” burst from the whole division as from one man. Dorseune’s grenadiers, as they moved with measured tramp along the Znaym road, took it up, then it died away, once more to ring out, “Vive l’Empereur!”

“General Macdonald, I thank you, and here, on the heights of Wagram, I present you with the baton of Marshal of France, won by your own valour, and the bravery of your officers and men.”

Macdonald’s face flushed, as he received the emblem of his high rank, and he bowed to his horse’s mane.

“The staff officer who headed the cavalry charge through the streets of Geransdorf, Macdonald,” continued Napoleon, “and the officer who commanded the leading sections of the voltigeurs? Ha! you, sir,” said

the Emperor, as Louis De Brissac dropped the point of his sword. "You are determined I shall remember you." The massive features were rigid, the mouth hard set. "What service have you, sir?"

"This is my first campaign, sire," replied Louis.

"Too young, then, to serve in my Guard—that requires four campaigns—but not too young to merit the cross of the brave."

"Sire, sire," stammered Louis, as the Emperor continued—

"Macdonald, note his name for the Cross of the Legion."

And once more the cry of "Vive l'Empereur!" rang out.

Tears of emotion stood in his eyes, something seemed to rise in his throat, and he could not speak.

"And now, sir, deliver this to Grouchy.

Tell him not to lose a moment. The enemy must be driven across the Thaya at any price."

A slight-built, smart-looking officer of voltigeurs stood near, as, saluting, Louis touched his horse with his spur and rode away.

"You commanded the leading sections before Geransdorf?" observed Napoleon, addressing him curtly.

"I did, sire," replied the officer, confidently.

"You are a captain?" asked the Emperor.

"No, sire, lieutenant only," answered the voltigeur, "but I am of the wood captains are made of."

"Very good, sir," was the harsh reply. "Next time you have a gun before you, capture it. Don't lie down to avoid its

fire. When I need wooden captains, I will remember you. Rejoin your corps, sir. Marshal, you will move at once on Stammersdorf."

The road to Znaym presented a sad spectacle as Louis De Brissac rode to the front. Pelotons of men, pale, bloody, and sometimes staggering through weakness, passed him ; whole regiments of stern, dejected-looking men, wearing the white uniform of Austria, and guarded by squadrons of Nansouty's Cuirassiers, Murat's Hussars, or the Lancers of Berg. The moans of the wounded, who had dragged themselves out of the way of the horses' hoofs, struck his ear ; dismounted guns, broken caissons, were there, and the road was often blocked by the bodies of dead horses, while the wheels of the artillery left their track marked in blood.

From an officer of General Grenier's regiment he learned that Grouchy was at that moment attacking the rear guard of the Austrians at Stammersdorf; and just as the cuirassiers and cavalry of the guard drove their demoralised rear guard through the streets of the village, he delivered his dispatches, and when night fell, the strong post of Nicolsberg was the only resting place for the enemy between the Danube and the Thaya.

The watch fires were lighted in the streets of Stammersdorf as he regained it after delivering his orders, pulling up his weary horse in the middle of General Broussier's brigade. Provisions were plentiful, and the fires of the various divisions of the French could be seen in every direction.

"There is a report of an armistice," said

La Gatinerie, coming up to the spot where Louis, having dismounted, stood. "You'll be able to air the cross of the Legion on the Boulevards soon, mon vieux."

"That he won't," replied Du Pitré, yawning heavily. "Grouchy has orders to drive ces Messieurs over the Thaya yonder at daybreak. En attendant—"

"My fellows are on out-picquet duty, and I must be off," replied the dragoon, throwing his cloak over his shoulders, and one by one followed his example, so that soon the various groups lay stretched by the fires in the streets, or slept the dead heavy sleep of fatigue in the wrecked houses of Stammersdorf, while the fires burned low, looking like hundreds of glow-worms scattered about the plain.

It was nearly midnight when De La

Gatinerie, after carefully visiting the outposts and vedettes, picked his way back along the crowded streets, stepping over the bodies of the sleepers. His comrades had all disappeared long before that, so, wrapping his cloak round him, he stretched himself beside the fire.

Some one touched him on the shoulder. It was his ordonnance, an old soldier who had grown grey in his service.

"Is that you, Pierre?" he asked, for the moon had not yet risen, and it was very dark.

"I've got you better quarters than these, mon Colonel," said the man, and the dragoon rose to follow.

A large room, in a house which had once been a respectable one, but whose doors and windows had gone for firewood.

Some part of the roof yet remained, and in one corner stood a bed. There was no bedstead, no mattress, but several bundles of straw had been shaken down, and a piece of worn carpet thrown over it. The cavalry cloak would serve for covering. Close by stood a wooden stool, and on it a bottle of wine, a pipe and some tobacco.

"You'll ruin me," exclaimed De La Gatinerie, laughing, and pinching his servant's ear. "You treat me as if I were a young lady making her first campaign in the salons of the Faubourg, Pierre. But for all that the tired dragoon threw himself on the straw with a sigh of pleasure, half rose, took a deep draught of wine, then falling back, in a few seconds was sound asleep.

The poor fellow had been for two days

and nights in the saddle, and yet he slept lightly, for a slight noise in the room roused him instantly. . With the instinct of an old soldier, he awoke with all his senses about him. He rubbed his eyes, and stared, for in the open doorway, lighted up by the moon which was shining in at the broken roof, stood a tall figure, wearing the long dragoon cloak, and brass helmet with its red plume. It was his late friend, Ernest Duval.

De La Gatinerie raised himself on his elbows, and stared in astonishment.

"What the deuce do you want?" he demanded.

"Don't you know me, Jules?" asked the figure. "It is I, your old friend Ernest! You remember our compact."

"Go to the devil! and don't bother me. I'm dead with sleep. Come another time,

it can't make any difference to you, Ernest," and he threw himself back.

The ghostly dragoon shook its head. "I have risked all to come to you," said the shadow, in low hollow tones. "Hear me, Jules!"

"I'll tell you what, Ernest," cried the exasperated and sleepy soldier, "I'll drive a pistol-ball through you if you don't be off!" and De La Gatinerie put out his hand to take his pistol.

"No, you dare not fire on me. Jules— Jules De La Gatinerie, remember our compact!" and the shadowy figure moved to the bedside, seeming to raise a broken arm with difficulty, placing two clammy fingers on the dragoon's hand.

There was no mistake. It was a dead man's hand, and De La Gatinerie could not repress a shudder.

"You are cruel, Jules. Come, give me your hand, for the last time, in friendship."

"Allons, donc! let it be for the last time then, Ernest. There!"

The cloak opened, an arm and hand appeared, looking ghastly white; he grasped the long clammy fingers, but no answering squeeze came. An icy thrill ran to his very heart, and the ghostly dragoon seemed to move backwards to the door, then vanished, the horrible arm, apparently tearing away from the body, remained in his grasp. With a cry of terror, De La Gatinerie dropped it, and fell back on the bed.

"Champagne dinner at the 'Rocher'!" shouted St. Ybars, bursting into the room, followed by Louis, Du Pitré, and half-a-dozen others. "Won in a canter, by Jove!"

"*Sacré nom !*" roared De La Gatinerie, as he hurled the dead man's arm through the broken roof, laughing heartily at his own terror.

"But, *parbleu !* I'll tell you what. You fellows should not have joked about poor Ernest, though."

"Nor did we—here he is in person," replied Louis, laughing. "Speak to him, Duval."

"I wasn't killed, only stunned, Jules," said his friend. "Made prisoner ; I was released by Grouchy's division, along with two hundred others."

"The devil take you !" grumbled De La Gatinerie.

"I came up just as you left to visit your outposts ; these fellows told me what had passed, and I never could resist a joke, you know."

“But the arm—where did you get that, hang you?” asked De La Gatinerie.

“Oh! arms and legs are lying thick enough where Nansouty’s fellows have passed!”

“C’est égal! to make a good soldier,” replied De La Gatinerie, as he poured out a tumbler of wine, “a man should have the legs of a stag, the patience of a camel, the courage of a lion, and—”

“And the appetite of a flea,” added St. Ybars—“for there goes the revaillé, and we must carry Nicolsberg before breakfast!”

CHAPTER VII.

ACROSS THE THAYA.

NICOLSBERG was a small town, but it was strongly fortified, and it was here the Archduke determined to make a last stand. It commanded the high road leading to Znaym, along which the defeated, but not yet demoralised, Austrians were retreating. The river Thaya ran near its walls, and so long as the guns of Nicolsberg were in the hands of the Archduke's artillerymen, so long were the bridges over the Thaya available for the passage of his troops. The orders Louis had delivered to

Grouchy were, that the place must be taken at any price.

Near the town a considerable earth-work had been hastily thrown up ; the place was held by Colloredo, and Lichtenstein's grenadiers, while the Austrian dragoons, and Hungarian Hussars—a splendid cavalry force, ready to act in any direction—were massed in close columns of regiments between the town and the river, on the plains along the banks of the Thaya.

As day dawned, a cold wind drove the fog, which had lain all night closely packed on the river, before it, and heavy masses of men looked like blurred spots in the fog-wreaths. Now and then the boom of a gun would come on the ear with a deadened thud, for all the world like the signal telling of ships in distress on the sea, while quick pattering volleys shook the misty

atmosphere, just as if men had woke up suddenly, fired, and then subsided into dream-land again.

“The day is breaking; this fog must lift,” observed Grouchy, who was sitting on a dismounted gun, his staff around him, waiting for the light to permit him to act, for the Emperor’s orders were imperative.

“General Delzons, you will carry yonder earthwork; Colonel Lacroix, the forty-third will act as support,” he continued.

Two thousand four hundred strong, Delzons’ division moved forward, the second, third, and twelfth cuirassiers on either flank. Partially concealed by the fog, it was some minutes before the advance was noticed, then, all at once the Austrian guns opened, the town and earth-work literally blazing with fire. Delzons’ tirailleurs made for the church-

yard, sheltering behind the grave-stones ; the French shells were falling among the houses like rain, while the forty-third dashed at the earthwork. The foremost among them were hurled down, many to be impaled on the friendly bayonets below ; but still they struggled on, until Austrians and French glared into each other's eyes, for, though surprised and discouraged, Col-lorido's grenadiers, men of gigantic size, fought to the last.

"The ninety-second are in the streets of Nicolsberg," cried an aide, riding up at the gallop to where Grouchy stood by the dis-mounted gun.

"The cavalry are overpowered, they are driven back on our guns, Marshal," reported an officer of cuirassiers, who, as he spoke, reeled in his saddle, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Grouchy's glass was turned on the earthwork, for the fog had lifted now.

"Bravo, forty-third!" he muttered, as a sergeant of the corps struck the pole of the regimental eagle into the earthwork.

"Ha! carry him away, poor fellow," for the cuirassier was dead; "and you, sir," he continued, turning to Louis, "tell General De Sahuc to charge at once, and drive the Austrians across the river. Quick, sir, there is not a moment to lose."

Deploying into line, the cavalry moved forward at the trot, then came the gallop, and Louis, having given the order, according to habit, joined De La Gatinerie's dragoons. On went the long line of cavalry, the horses thundering over the plain. Before them the hussars of Hesse-Homburg, and a splendid division of Austrian cuirassiers. For a moment horses and men

became mixed together in one mass of wild confusion, the deadly sabres and the pistol-shots doing their work, the next the Austrian line broke and fled, while from the earth-work and the town, Colloredo and Lichtenstein grenadiers poured in confusion, the shouts of the voltigeurs and the forty-third mixing with the spattering fire of the musketry, as De Sahuc's troopers sabred the fugitives. It was a sickening scene of slaughter, prisoners were made by whole sections, and at last, as the flying mass were driven across the river, the Austrian artillery on the opposite bank opened, sacrificing their own men to stop the French advance.

"Not hurt, De Brissac," cried St. Ybars, as Louis' horse went down struck by a ball.

The tête du pont was held by a Croat and several Hungarian regiments, and

a score of guns loaded to the muzzle with grape pointed so as to sweep it.

“Forward!” shouted Dorseune, as the grenadiers of the guard dashed at it; but the head of the column withered away before the deadly fire, and the cheers of the Croats rang over the tumult. Again and again they charged uselessly.

“Are these the men of Austerlitz and of Wagram?” exclaimed Grouchy, riding up at the gallop, “follow me,” he cried, dismounting from his horse.

De Brissac staggered to his feet. The cavalry charge, the *melée*, the thunder of the guns, had sent his blood dancing through his veins. Seizing the tattered eagle of the forty-third, he called on the grenadiers to follow, and dashed at the bridge; but even Dorseune’s veterans hung back, for the Austrian grape swept it.

“Hurrah for the forty-third!” shouted little Pimpernet, as, with a score or two of the corps, their uniforms torn, and their faces so blackened, that they looked like devils more than men, he broke through the press, and followed.

“Hurrah for Cousin Louise!” was heard for a moment above the tumult, and then Sergeant Pimpernet fell forward, a ball through his forehead, while the head of the column withered away. Du Pitré was down, Lacombe shot through the heart, while Louis was struggling for life with a powerful Croat, whose hand grasped the eagle. The example was given. With a shriek of rage the grenadiers moved forward, Grouchy and Dorseune at their head. The shot plunged through their ranks, but it was unheeded. “Vive l’Empereur,” shouted the men, as they rolled over in

their agony, and fell into the river below ; but the work was done, the bridge was carried, while Nansouty's dragoons, and De Sahuc's hussars pressing forward, sabred the Austrian artillerymen at their guns.

“ Place, place pour l'Empereur ! ” and Napoleon, who had witnessed the whole affair from the rising ground near, passed the bridge, followed by his escort.

“ Cavalry, Grouchy. Send forward every regiment. Give them not a moment's quiet. We have them now ! ” he exclaimed.

Propped up against the wheel of an Austrian gun, sat De Brissac, slowly struggling back to consciousness.

“ Vive l'Empereur ! ” he cried, as Napoleon checked his horse close to where Grouchy stood, and he endeavoured to

struggle to his feet, by the help of the standard pole which he still grasped.

"Are you badly hurt, sir?" asked the Emperor, as he turned to him.

"A bayonet thrust through the groin, sire, a bullet through the right breast."

"Look to him, Dulac," said Napoleon, turning to his own surgeon. "France can not afford to lose you, sir," and the Emperor bent down, while, taking the cross from his breast, he attached it himself to his uniform, all torn as it was, and black with powder. "It is not I but France who gives you this, and well and gallantly have you earned it."

Louis' head had fallen forward; he had fainted in his endeavour to press his lips on the Emperor's hand.

"I say, De La Gatinerie, don't forget that dinner at the Rocher. We are not

far from the end of the campaign, my boy!" shouted St. Ybars, as the 7th dragoons came sweeping past at a gallop, the old colonel, his drawn sword resting on the pommel of his saddle, his bridle hand low, looking grim and soldierly, as he passed on to the front.

The Emperor slept on a bear skin that night, in the centre of a square formed by the Imperial Guard, while Macdonald's and Massena's divisions bivouacked on the ground they had so gallantly won, Grouchy harassing the now demoralised enemy up to the very walls of Znaym. At midnight, an aide-de-camp arrived, and, by the light of torches, the Emperor read the despatch, in which the Archduke sued for an armistice.

It was granted, haughtily. The terms were severe, but the Austrian army could

resist no longer, and a peace followed the brilliant achievement which gave the conqueror the hand of the Archduchess Marie Louise, and to the Napoleonic dynasty the King of Rome.

CHAPTER VIII.

LA REINE HORTENSE.

THE Emperor had retired to Schonbrunn, dictating his terms, and the article of the treaty which related to his future Empress was kept a profound secret. Josephine was at Malmaison, her favourite residence, for though there was no magnificence, a great deal of home-comfort reigned there.

She was sitting in the room reserved for the Emperor when at Malmaison, but it was a rare thing for her to occupy that particular apartment of the palace. On

the table was a book open at the place where Napoleon's eye had last glanced at the page. There lay the pen he had used, when last he signed his name, the ink-stand with its dried-up ink stood just where it had been when he used it before leaving. There, too, a map of Europe, showing many a pencil mark, and pen scratch. It was the one he had pored over when tracing out the plan of the campaign, the fruits of which she was now to gather.

Close to the wall was the curtainless bed, his sword and uniform hanging above it. These were Josephine's relics, which she cared for, and dusted daily with her own hands. And that morning, she did a thing she had never done before. She sat down at the table, poured some ink into the stand, and wrote a letter. Singularly

enough, it was addressed to her daughter, yet Hortense too was at Malmaison.

Every one always seemed at home there, for no state, no ceremony, was practised.

"I bought Malmaison," said Josephine to Ida Caraccioli, "when Buonaparte was in Egypt. It cost me one hundred and sixty thousand francs. I did not dare ask for money, and I was obliged to sell all I had to provide for our daily wants, and so I love Malmaison, Ida."

Hortense was busy as usual. The tables and chairs of her apartment were littered with drawings and music, for these formed the necessities of her life. Before her, looking up into her face, knelt Ida Caraccioli, and Madam Campan was playing with a beautiful boy near an open window, the Countess De Broc looking on.

"Come, Ida, dry your eyes, and tell me

has there been any question of your marriage with this preux chevalier of yours?"

"No, Princess, not so far as the Emperor is concerned, but we have been engaged for years."

"You know how fond Napoleon is of arranging these matters himself, and that he gives a marriage portion of never less than forty thousand francs to his officers."

"The money does not signify to me," replied Ida.

"No, but it does to him, if I understand you rightly. Louis De Brissac has nothing but his sword. He has fairly earned the Emperor's gratitude. There can be no objection to the marriage, except in a pecuniary view. I will think of it, Ida."

A knock at the door, and Louis himself entered. Pale and worn, his left arm in a sling, his eyes looked preter-

naturally large. Leaning heavily on a stick, he paid his devoirs to the Princess, who, like Josephine, had the knack of making every one at home with her.

“One question, Ida, and I release you. Sit down, Monsieur. The Empress sent you to me, you say?”

“Yes, Princess. She was writing, and that too in the Emperor’s room, a thing I never saw her do before. She seemed radiant with happiness. I have seldom seen her so elated. She told me to remain with you.”

“Indeed, that almost makes me feel anxious, Ida.”

“Your Highness will soon be relieved, then,” said Louis, speaking in low tones. “Her Majesty was seated at the window as I came up the Lime Tree Avenue. She called me, asked after my health, enquired

where I was going, and gave me this letter for you, Princess."

"A letter! but why not speak to me? why not send for me? It seems strange."

Hortense broke the seal, read the first lines, and then leaned back, becoming very pale.

"A kingdom," she muttered, "for me. Oh, no, that means exile."

They all gathered round her alarmed, and even the little etiquette usually observed was forgotten. The boy looked up into her face enquiringly.

"Read for me, Stephanie," she said, "read it aloud."

Madame De Broc obeyed.

"My dear Hortense,—

"I have great news for you, and, fearing to tell it verbally, I have preferred to

write. Call your friends around you while you read my letter.' ”

“ And have I not obeyed her ? ” murmured Hortense, looking first at one, then at another.

“ ‘ The Emperor, ever kind, ever generous, to me, has named your husband King of Holland. I write to you, surrounded by my relics, souvenirs of him to whom you, as well as myself, will feel deeply grateful, and who in thus conferring a kingdom on her who is so dear to me, gives a new proof of his tenderness and devotion. I do not speak of our separation ; on that point we must be silent. Adieu, my Queen. I kiss a forehead worthy to wear a crown.

“ ‘ Your mother and friend,

“ ‘ JOSEPHINE. ’ ”

Hortense was sobbing now. Suddenly

she caught up the child, who was standing looking up at her with the calm quiet gaze peculiar to him. It was her son, Louis Napoleon, a quick intelligent child, beautiful as a girl.

"And you, Oui Oui, you will be a king one day," she exclaimed, kissing him hysterically.

The child went by the name of Oui Oui, and his mother sometimes called him the Princess Louis, so delicate and girlish was his face.

"Stay, there is a postscript," said Madame Campan, as the Countess was about to return the letter.

"'In his solicitude for you,'" she read, "'the Emperor places one hundred thousand francs at your disposal for preliminary expenses.'"

Hortense sprang to her feet.

"There," she said, "your future is secure—all is straightforward," and, taking Ida's hand, she placed it in Louis's grasp.

Again a knock at the door was heard, and Prince Eugene joined the group.

"Nay," he said, "I can't allow this. I too owe a debt of gratitude to this gentleman, Hortense. A high position on my staff is at his service, but we must have the Emperor's consent first."

"And if he won't give it, we can but take our own way after all," said Hortense, laughing as she looked at the confused but happy Ida. "I know the Empress will help us."

CHAPTER IX.

CARLO AND CARLINE.

JOSEPHINE had made more people happy than she had calculated that morning, and hers was that soft yielding disposition which enabled her to live in the happiness of others. To say no to a petition was all but impossible. Her face was very bright as she sat at the window looking down the lime-tree avenue. She had spoken to Louis as he came up, had given him her note, telling him where he would find Ida, and there she sat thinking that Hortense would at that moment

be reading it, that peace was signed, and she might now look for the return of her hero. Napoleon had written her some very cold letters lately, had remonstrated with her as to her expenses, and condemned her lavishness.

At her feet her two favourite dogs Carlo and Carline lay rolled up into balls, fast asleep. They respected no one those dogs, not even Napoleon himself, and what was still worse they could bite as well as bark. The proofs of this were often to be found on the delicate white silk stocking of an ambassador, or chargé-d'affaires, who, writhing with pain, needed all his diplomacy even to endeavour to bear the infliction. Ney, himself, the bravest of the brave, had remonstrated with the Emperor as to the dogs, but Napoleon had only laughed. He ever humoured Josephine.

A carriage passed the great gates, and the Empress's face darkened, for she recognised, leaning back on its cushions, Fouché, and between herself and the Duke d'Otranto there was a settled dislike. He was in fact her *bête noir*. She must receive him though, and she might as well do so where she was.

Fouché was well aware of the awkward habits of the two dogs, consequently generally took his precautions, providing some propitiatory offering in the shape of bonbons. He had even laughed at the Cardinal Legate when attacked by Carlo and Carline, telling him his red stockings would enable him to face them without showing his wounds; but this time Fouché had evidently forgotten the bonbons, and his face too bore traces of deep anxiety and uneasiness. The dogs were not disposed

to pass over the neglect, and hardly had the door been thrown open and the Duke of Otranto announced, than they rushed to the attack. Eventually they were captured, but not without difficulty, and not before Carline had found a weak point, and her teeth, sharp as needles, had met in Fouché's leg.

There was a bitter smile on the minister's quivering lips as he bowed low before the Empress.

"I thought you were at Vienna, Duke, with Napoleon," said Josephine, the bright happy look fading from her eyes.

"At Vienna ; no, your majesty. With the Emperor, yes. He is at Fontainebleau," replied Fouché.

"At Fontainebleau !" exclaimed Josephine, starting. "And why not here, Duke ? Why not here ?"

Fouché had come there with a direct object in view, had carefully prepared his plans and shaped his course, but Carlo and Carline had irritated him, and he now saw but one mode of carrying out the Emperor's desires. So he followed it at once.

"Have you not heard?" asked the Minister, as he drew a chair near, speaking in a low confidential voice. "Have you not heard the reports in circulation?"

"Certainly not," replied the Empress, looking at him steadily, "how should I?"

"I have ever been in reality your Majesty's true friend, and it grieves me to be the first bearer of such tidings."

"Speak, sir, and speak plainly," replied Josephine, now thoroughly alarmed, her voice trembling. "What reports are

abroad? Why has the Emperor gone to Fontainebleau?"

There was a silence, and Fouché's eyes sank before Josephine's fixed gaze.

"In high and in low places," he said, speaking very slowly, "from the saloons of the Faubourg to the café of the Boulevard Montmartre, there is but one topic of conversation."

- "And that is, sir?" asked the Empress, excitedly.

"That the Emperor demands a separation," replied the Minister, bluntly.

Josephine was not a strong-minded woman, but she struggled hard.

"Are you commissioned by him to say this?" she asked.

Fouché bowed.

"But why, sir? What have I done to merit it?"

"Nothing, your Majesty. My heart is breaking while I speak," and Fouché smiled blandly. "The Emperor's commands were that I should explain this personally."

"Then do explain it sir," answered Josephine, for even her gentle nature was outraged.

"The Emperor is thinking not of himself, but of his dynasty. It has long grieved him to be without an heir."

Josephine was deeply affected, but her eyes were dry as she covered them with her hands.

Fouché continued, slowly and methodically, but relentlessly.

"Act as a Queen, Madame," he said, "and forget that you are a woman. You will retain your rank and title. The Archduchess Marie Louise will merely fulfil a

public necessity, to give an heir to the dynasty."

Josephine started as the name was mentioned, and the tears oozed through her fingers. "This then is the fruit of Wagram," she said, bitterly.

"There would be a great part to be played," continued Fouché, coldly and calculatingly, as he entered on the second part of his mission, "if your majesty has the courage, a part which would surround your name with a halo of glory."

It was cunningly put. Fouché's object was to drop the seed, and leave it to germinate.

Josephine raised her head, and looked at him through her tears.

"Be the first to ask, Empress, for that separation which will give an heir to

France, and perpetuate the Napoleonic dynasty," he said.

"It is too hard! I cannot do it! No, I cannot!"

"Show the courage of a Sovereign, lady. Remember the sacrifice is for France, and for Napoleon," replied Fouché.

"And do you dare to think, duke, that I have not already shown it?" exclaimed the Empress, a sudden gust of passion moving her. "Do you dare to think that a woman's eyes have been closed to the coming danger? Do you believe that a wife could be blind to a husband's yearnings?"

Fouché was progressing faster than he had hoped.

"Then act as a Queen, madame," he replied, quickly. "Remember you are the

wife of an Emperor. Send down your name in history as one who fearlessly immolated her own feelings for the good of France. It is this Napoleon is doing. His love is yours, but the country needs an heir."

Josephine's emotion moved even the cold calculating Minister who was carrying out his master's long-matured policy.

"Write to the Senate, madame, and break yourself," he continued, "the bonds which, for state reasons, the French nation must and will sever, if *you* do not do so."

Josephine could not feel this. Her mind was turned on her own wrongs and outraged feelings.

Starting up, she walked quickly to a little cabinet, opened it, searched for a moment, and returned.

"You think I have borne nothing, duke.

There, read those," and she pushed a bundle of letters into his hands, and then once more flung herself into her chair, covering her face with her hands.

Fouché opened them deliberately. They had been written during the course of the campaign, and were short and cold, bearing evidently purposely the impress of the meditated scheme.

"Well!" she exclaimed, as he folded the letters after glancing over them—"well!"

"I can only advise you to the best of my power. Your Majesty was right," he replied, rising, "and it is evident this has been long meditated. None knows better than your Majesty how difficult it is to alter the Emperor's views once they are formed. On this point his will is immoveable."

"Does Eugene—does my son know of this?" asked Josephine. "Send him to me."

"He does, your Majesty," replied Fouché, rising. "He is with the Queen of Holland, and shall be summoned at once."

And so the interview ended. Prince Eugene had, under the personal influence of the Emperor, whom he loved blindly, forgotten the son in the statesman. A long and terrible interview followed, in which he advocated Napoleon's views, and the result is a matter of history. It ended at last, and then only with a burst of hysterical grief. Josephine threw herself into the arms of Ida Caraccioli as the door closed on the retreating figure of Prince Eugene.

"And you—will you, too, cease to love

me? Will you leave me," she asked, "now I am so fallen?"

"Never, your Majesty. See the Emperor yourself. Let no third person," she said, "whatever be his rank, interfere between husband and wife." Ida spoke strongly, proudly, and firmly. "When you know from himself his real views, it will be time to grieve or to rejoice."

And Josephine was comforted. She parted the glossy black hair from Ida's forehead; she pressed her lips upon it, and then, pointing to the lime-tree walk, where Prince Eugene and Louis De Brissac could be seen in earnest conference—

"I am Empress enough yet to secure your happiness, however my own may be wrecked. Remember that. You will find this true, should you need me."

"My happiness will be with you, your

Majesty," returned Ida, gratefully. "I could have left you in prosperity—in adversity, never!"

And so the Empress smiled once again for a time.

CHAPTER X.

NAVARRE.

THE trees were budding in the forest of Evreux, and the Chateau De Navarre, the old palace of the Dukes of Bouillon, was crowded, for it was now the residence of the Empress Josephine. Situated in a beautiful valley, not far from the town of Evreux, the quaint old chateau, with its great dome, was completely shut in by the forest, through which ran the clear waters of the river Iton, winding here and there, the whole encircled by hills, which seemed to shut it out from the busy world.

Navarre was a fit retreat for an Empress, for it was one of the most beautiful spots in France. The park and ornamental grounds were both very extensive, and artificial streams, basins, and jets d'eaux, were scattered here and there with a liberal hand.

The Garden of Hebe, with its splendid marble statue of the goddess, existed in all its beauty, and just in the centre of the Iton was a beautiful island, laid out with great taste, and on which rose an artificial ruin, called the Temple of Love. Rare frescoes adorned the walls, and pillars of blue crystal upheld the roof. They were hollow, and lamps could be hung inside them, giving out a chastened, softened light.

Rare flowers, from every quarter of the globe, had been collected there, and few

spots existed in France which could rival in beauty with the old Chateau of Navarre.

A small, gaily-painted boat, was drawn up on the island one morning, when the month of March was keeping faith with the old adage, and, having come in like a lion, was going out like a lamb. The large leaves of the water-lilies were glistening in the sunshine, and the trout were leaping in the river, the birds singing among the trees. Ida Caraccioli was seated on the banks of the Iton, and by her side, dressed in the uniform of a Captain of the Imperial Guard, Louis De Brissac. He had come that morning, the confidential bearer of a letter from the Emperor, announcing to Josephine the reward of her devotion to him—the birth of the King of Rome.

“For two years, Ida,” said Louis, con-

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“For two years, Ida,” said Louis, con-

tinuing a conversation which had lasted some time—"For two years the Emperor has sternly refused his consent to our union. Prince Eugene has done all he could, in vain."

"Well, we are both young, Louis," she replied, smiling. "We can wait—and see," she said, pointing to the river, "the boat is loose, and will float away!"

"And leave us—the sole inhabitants of the Ile d'Amour!" said Louis laughing, as he sprang up to secure it under the branches of the willow, on whose fallen trunk they were sitting; then, throwing himself on the grass at her feet—"There are rumours of war, dear Ida," he remarked.

"Well, the guard will be at Schonbrunn once more."

"No, Moscow will be our head-quarters,"

replied Louis, proudly. "This time it will be Russia shall feel the sharp edge of our sabres. But, on the eve of war, I ask you—why should the Emperor thus dispose of our happiness? Ida," and he took her hand and kissed it, "how many years have gone by since you promised me your love on the hill-side at Naples? All ambition is gone from me but this. The miseries entailed by war have, I think, cured me of a thirst for fame. The Empress is our friend."

But Ida was busy playing with the long branches of the willow tree, which hung down over the waters of the Iton. She did not speak.

"This war will come upon us suddenly. It has ever been the Emperor's policy," pleaded Louis, "to prepare all beforehand, to map out the whole campaign, and then, all of a sudden, it is declared, and the

different divisions of the army moved like the pieces of a chess-board."

Still she answered not, her eyes were following the rapid flight of a kingfisher as it skurried up the stream, its blue and gold plumage glittering in the sunlight.

"I have but a month's leave," pleaded Louis, speaking low, "and at the end of that time may be ordered away. Why should we not be married, Ida? All the Emperor can do is to expel me from his guard. Will the Empress help us, will she?"

She withdrew the hand he had been toying with, but threw her arm over his shoulder, and bending down, as he looked up into her face, pressed her lips on his forehead.

"Louis," she said, in a low voice,

"listen. These were her own words to me that wretched day at Malmaison."

"Well, dearest!" said Louis, as she paused to collect her memory.

" 'I am Empress enough, yet,' repeated Ida, speaking slowly but distinctly, 'to secure your happiness. Remember, you will find this true if you need me.' Those were her words, Louis, but I have never reminded her of them."

"Then do so now, my own love!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "I have failed, and Prince Eugene also. 'Not while he is in my guard,' has invariably been the Emperor's reply. I will die for him if necessary, but in this he has no right to interfere. The present is ours—the future will be his. Speak to the Empress. Claim her promise this day, Ida, this very day."

Louis pushed his cause warmly and eloquently, and when the sound of the bell came ringing over the river, their plans were arranged.

At Navarre, Josephine kept up much more state than she had done at Malmaison. The Emperor wished it, for she was to lose nothing of her station and rank by the separation she had asked for, and the dinner that day was a more than ordinarily ceremonious one, many dignitaries of Evreux being present.

It was confined to one service it is true, everything being placed on the table at the same time, except the dessert, while large buffets held plentiful supplies of cold meat, and pâtés.

Each guest had a valet standing behind him, the Empress alone having four, together with the maitre d'hote, who stood

at her elbow. The dinner service that day was of costly Sevres china, a present from the Emperor, and in the centre of the table stood the surtout of gold, given to Josephine by the city of Paris, on her coronation.

At her right hand sat Mademoiselle D'Avallon, and the Archbishop of Tours on her left, while Madame De Rémusat, De Ségur, De Mackan, and Madame Colbert, added to the brilliancy of the entertainment. That evening, in honour of the news Louis had brought, a grand ball was given, but at ten o'clock the Empress had not appeared in the brilliantly lighted *salle des gardes*.

"I wonder where Ida is?" said Louis to himself, as he sat chatting gaily with Madame Gazani, the Empress's reader, whose magnificent black eyes had more

than once attracted the attention of Napoleon himself. Suddenly, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Monsieur De Brissac, but you are wanted. Pardon, Madame," added Monsieur De Turpin, bowing to Madame Gazani, "the Empress wants our young friend."

"Then Ida has spoken," thought Louis, as he rose; and his cheek flushed, while his heart beat fast, as he followed the gentleman-in-waiting. "She has claimed the Empress's promise. Now for the result."

"A brilliant ball, to celebrate a great event, Monsieur De Brissac," observed De Turpin lightly, as they took their way up the room, forced to pause every now and again, before they could open a passage. "Only see how De Beaumont is carrying on with the wife of the prefect of Evreux."

But Louis was too full of his own thoughts to reply, or even to look, or he would have seen that one or two of Josephine's household closed in behind them as they moved along.

They had left the ball-room now, and the sound of the music grew fainter as they traversed the long corridor, when De Turpin, turning to the right, threw open a heavy door.

Stooping his head, De Brissac followed, descending some steps, and when he raised it again, to his great surprise, he found himself in the small chapel of the chateau of Navarre. Gloomy and solemn-looking it ever was, even in the times of the De Bouillons, but now it was only dimly lighted, except near the altar. De Turpin laughed.

"Why, you looked scared, Monsieur De

Brissac," he said. "There's many a one will be too happy to take your place, there is still time for retreat."

But as he spoke, the Empress Josephine came towards them, leaning on the arm of Monsieur De Clermont Tonnere. She wore her ball dress, waved with gold, her neck and fingers glittered with rubies and diamonds.

"It is thus Josephine keeps her promise," she said, as she led Ida, also dressed for the ball in white moire antique, her hair adorned with orange blossoms, and placed her hand in that of Louis.

The Archbishop of Tours in full canonicals stood within the altar rail. Mademoiselle D'Avallon, Madame De Rémusat, and the Countess D'Arberg, surrounded Ida; Monsieur De Balsac, De Turpin, and several others of the Empress's household were there.

Not a moment was lost. The Empress had at once redeemed her promise, happy, as she ever was, when she could make people so. And while the good folks from Evreux were laughing, talking, dancing, and flirting in the ball-room, while Monsieur De Beaumont was inflicting tortures on the portly prefect of Evreux by his attentions to his pretty wife, while Monsieur De Portales, who had taken De Brissac's place, was vowing eternal love to Madame Gazani—Louis and Ida were married in the old church of the Dukes De Bouillon.

The Empress Josephine's name stood at the bottom of the contract as witness, and while the Archbishop of Tours raised his hands over their heads, as they knelt before the altar to receive the nuptial blessing, she slipped into his hands a small paper.

It was a gift, securing him four hundred thousand francs, Ida's marriage portion as one of her Majesty's ladies.

"And now, my children, I must separate you for a time," she said, as the last words of the archbishop's blessing were spoken. "Monsieur De Brissac, give your arm to Mademoiselle D'Avallon. Away to your room, Ida. Take the orange blossoms out of your hair. Monsieur De Clermont Tommerce, your arm. My guests must not think I have forsaken them."

And Josephine moved away, glittering with diamonds and radiant with happiness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BANKS OF THE ITON.

“YOUR leave will expire in a few days, Louis,” she said, with a sigh.

“You are always thinking of the little black cloud in the bright blue sky, dear Ida.”

“Since you promised we were to have no secrets from each other now, and told me the tale Philip related to you before he died, I have looked upon the cloud as very big and very black, Louis.”

“But why, Ida? Look at that splendid

avenue of chestnuts, with their green leaves ; look at the Iton there, with its clear waters sparkling in the sun ; look at the April flowers springing up under our feet—and then enjoy the present, Ida.”

But she was silent, and seemed sunk in reverie. They were sitting on the grass at the foot of an old sycamore tree, whose knotted roots ran down to the river banks. Up the avenue of chestnuts the chateau of Navarre could be seen, while a little above where they sat the river divided into two arms, and came tumbling over the rocks, forming a beautiful cascade. A rustic bridge was thrown over it, and a miniature kiosque had been constructed among the trees close by. It had been a favourite place for fishing in the time of the Dukes De Bouillon.

“ If what Philip said be true, you are

the last descendant of an old line, and I can quite understand the Emperor's refusal."

"Nonsense, Ida; it's all moonshine. And suppose it to be true, what proof have I? Whatever papers Philip had are gone for ever. I have resolved never to think of it again, so don't make me break my vow."

"But Louis," she persisted, as she laid her hand on his, and leaned back on the arm thrown round her; "the Emperor's anger could separate us."

"Not for long, dear; besides we shall know all shortly. He must have received the Empress Josephine's letter."

"What, if his anger should fall on her? Oh! Louis, if I had known of this before, I should not have ventured on the step we took."

But he only laughed, and kissed her, though do what he would that April morning, she could not shake off her gloomy thoughts.

“You know all the old tales and legends which hang round Navarre like a cloud. Come, dearest, tell me one, and don’t let there be any of your favourite gloom about it. Let it be bright and beautiful as the day and yourself.”

Ida let her head fall on her husband’s shoulder, and looked up dreamily into the leaves of the sycamore.

“How can I tell you anything about Navarre that is not melancholy?” she asked. “Why, last night’s adventure for instance.”

“Was that so very sad?” replied Louis, and they both laughed heartily. “I shall never forget the portly De Clermont

Tonnerre, as he was being sawed out of the flooring."

The fact was, that at the ball of the preceding evening, Monsieur De Clermont Tonnerre, a heavy man of some five and thirty years, wishful to show off his dancing, had forgotten that the marble floor had been tightly covered with planking, a space of some six inches being left between the two. In one of his most brilliant entrechats, he had gone through, and the saw had to be used before he could be extricated.

"And he would persist in it that he was not hurt, and asked me to dance," continued Ida, still laughing. "Stay, Louis," she said suddenly; "there is a tale attached to yonder kiosque, and the spot where we are sitting. It was in the time of the De Bouillons, and the then duke had one

daughter, a beautiful damsel, called Louise."

"Not Cousin Louise," interrupted Louis, and they both laughed.

"If you interrupt me, I shall never get to the end. Well, Mademoiselle Louise was destined to make a brilliant marriage."

"In that she was like Cousin Louise. Poor Pimpernet," said Louis, sighing as he thought of the gallant little sergeant.

"Will you listen to me or not?" asked Ida, as she turned the face that was resting on his shoulder to him.

"Certainly I will," he replied, interrupting again, this time by kissing the lips, which were so near his.

"Well, then, Mademoiselle Louise fell in love with a very handsome and gallant soldier in the duke's service, a Monsieur De Trêmes."

“Ladies will do such things,” interpolated Louis; “eh, Ida?”

“But there came to Navarre an intriguing powerful noble, and though no one had noticed what was going on up to that time, Monsieur De Praslin saw it at once.”

“He was a kind of Fouché, Duke of Otranto, of that day, Ida.”

“One evening when Mademoiselle Louise had stolen out, and was walking with her lover, De Praslin stepped from under the trees yonder. Raising his plumed hat, ‘Praslin salutes Mademoiselle De Bouillon, and her favoured lover,’ he said, with a sneer, evidently intending to inform the Duke of what he had seen.

“‘Oh, mon Dieu! what will become of me?’ exclaimed Mademoiselle Louise.

‘I am lost,’ and she sank half fainting on the ground.

“De Trêmes knelt beside her. He begged of her to be reassured. ‘Nothing shall ever be known of this. Your rank and honour shall be saved,’ he said, as he kissed her hand. ‘Return, play your part, and show no sign of emotion,’ he continued.”

“Well, Ida?” asked Louis, as he toyed with the long braids of black hair.

“Well, De Trêmes walked into the room where her father, the Duke, sat playing cards; and Mademoiselle Louise was before him, and there, too, was De Praslin, who had not had time as yet to tell his tale.

“‘I must publicly insult you, or you me. Take your choice, Monsieur De Praslin,’ whispered De Trêmes.”

“A gallant fellow,” remarked Louis. “See, there is an officer of hussars, riding up the chestnut-tree avenue.”

But Ida’s eyes were looking up into the branches of the sycamore, and her cheek was resting on the cross that had once been Napoleon’s, as she continued her tale.

“‘I prefer the latter,’ replied De Praslin haughtily, for he knew himself one of the best swordsmen of his day. The insult was soon given and returned, seconds chosen, and the two adjourned to this very spot by the river to fight.

“‘I have one favour to ask you, sir,’ said De Trêmes, as the two stood opposite each other, before their swords crossed. ‘Monsieur De Praslin, will you promise me, on your honour as a gentleman, that should I fall by your sword you will never reveal what is known to you and me alone?’

“A gallant gentleman,” said Louis ; “and so he sacrificed his life to save Mademoiselle De Bouillon?”

“He intended to have done so,” continued Ida, “only, as chance willed it, he ran De Praslin through the heart.”

“Bravo ! I’m glad to hear it.”

“But he was forced to fly, for the dead man’s family was a powerful one ; he joined the army, and a few months later fell, sword in hand, before the walls of Madrid.”

“A soldier’s death ; and Mademoiselle Louise, I suppose, married and forgot him, eh, Ida?”

“It is said his name was on her lips, Louis, when she died. Mademoiselle d’Avallon occupies her room now, and her portrait yet hangs on the wall there. She must have been very lovely.”

"Your tale is not a gay one, at all events."

"But it is true, Louis."

"True as my love for you, Ida dearest," and Louis took toll of the lips once more as she ceased.

Then both were silent for a time; the noise of the cascade and the rustling of the breeze through the leaves of the sycamore could be heard, with the splash of some heavier trout than usual as the fish rose at the flies. Suddenly Louis started, as the words of a well-known song came floating on the breeze.

"On ne saurait trop embellir
La courte espace de la vie ;
Pour moi je veux le parcourir
Avec l'amour et la folie."

"It is St. Ybars, Ida," said Louis ;
"it was he I saw riding up the avenue,"

and both started to their feet as Henri, his hussar uniform glittering in the sunlight, came towards them with his usual light careless step.

"Love-making on the banks of the Iton," he cried, laughing, as he crossed the bridge, "while our divisions are concentrating on the Vistula."

"What's the news, Henri?"

"News, mon vieux," replied Henri, as he kissed Ida's hand with old-fashioned French politeness, "why, Oudinot has orders to concentrate at Dantzic, Ney to establish his head-quarters at Thorn, the corps of Prince Eugene are moving on the Vistula."

Ida's face turned pale, but Louis felt the blood dance in his veins despite himself.

"Five hundred thousand men in line, extending from Bohemia to the Baltic, and the Russians yet dreaming of peace."

“Ma foi, we will wake them to the boom of the guns of Wagram,” answered Louis, drawing himself up.

Ida laid her hand on his arm, looking up into his face, her own very pale.

St. Ybars walked away humming a tune. The hussar was only doing as he would be done by.

“I do not say remain with me, but it is hard to part so soon,” murmured the young wife, as her head sank on his shoulder, and his arm twined round her waist.

Half an hour later the three were walking up the avenue of chestnuts on their way to the Chateau of Navarre, and Louis had learned that his orders were to make the best of his way to Havre, and join the Mutine frigate, fitting out with stores, guns, and ammunition, for General Rapp’s brigade, then under the walls of Dantzic.

“Do your duty,” were his wife’s last words, as she gave him a parting kiss, “but oh, Louis, dearest Louis, that done come back to me for ever.”

Honours, distinction, decorations, and military glory, had been wiped out of her mind, and by what ? why, by the wife’s love for the husband. And he, what were his feelings ? They will perhaps be best told by his reply as he passionately returned the parting kiss of his young and beautiful wife.

“Never to part more, Ida. Yes, I will return for once and ever, and so farewell to ambitious hopes and Philip’s dream. My father’s Life Guardsman will have died in vain.”

CHAPTER XII.

AFLOAT ONCE MORE.

“**T**HERE are your despatches. You are to embark on board the *Mutine*, at Havre, deliver them personally to General Rapp, at Dantzic, and remain attached to his staff until further orders.”

“And you, St. Ybars?” asked Louis, as the two rode along the high road leading to Nantes the following morning.

“Rejoin my regiment, which forms part of the cavalry reserve, under Murat. But I say, *mon vieux*, what have you been

doing to anger the petit caporal ? He was furious when your name was mentioned as the next on the roster of the guard for this kind of duty."

"It's my marriage, St. Ybars, angered him," replied Louis. "But don't let us talk of that just now."

"All right. Well, all I can tell you is, that as I waited for my orders, the Emperor was walking to and fro in his cabinet, his hands behind his back, as is his custom when thinking deeply. I caught your name, and the words Chateau de Vincennes coupled with it."

"The deuce you did, St. Ybars !"

"Prince Eugene was there, and he spoke long with the Emperor. I could not hear what was going on, but then Fouché came up with the despatches for Rapp. You know his quiet smile—you remember it

under the Clovis oak at Malmaison, eh, Louis ?”

“Very well indeed,” answered Louis, smiling. “‘Go and get yourself killed elsewhere, sir,’ were his words at that moment.”

“Well, I fancy that was about what he thought also on the occasion I am telling you of. ‘Perhaps these may do as well, sire,’ he said, as he gave the papers for signature ; ‘at all events, they will keep him out of harm’s way for some time to come.’”

“Well, I’ll do my duty, ‘advienne que pourra,’” said Louis, laughing.

“I am sure you will, mon vieux ; but I fancy you know more of this than you choose to tell.”

“Perhaps I do, St. Ybars,” replied Louis—“perhaps I do : but my younger

days were spent among a people who never allowed themselves to be beaten by circumstances, and I've learned the habit."

"Those sacréd coquins of English ! Yes, they take a deal of beating. I was on Montbrun's staff when we made that charge on their squares a few months at Fuentes D'Onoro. It was a splendid sight, Louis, as Wathier's hussars and dragoons came on at the trot, and the English formed square."

"Well ?" inquired Louis.

"Then came the words, 'Au galop !' The English pounded into us with grape from the guns between their squares ; the file-firing was about the deadliest and steadiest I ever witnessed. We rode slap into them. General Hill, who commanded, was taken, with fifteen hundred men, and what do you think they did ?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Louis.
"But I say, St. Ybars, there are the houses of Nantes, and here we separate."

"General Fournier went down, the grape and round shot were pouring into us. Our reserves did not come up, and the English cavalry did. Well, we could not keep our prisoners. In the confusion the whole of them escaped, and instead of bolting to the rear, as any fellows in their senses would have done, they quickly formed themselves again into square, right in the middle of our fellows, and began firing again. Ah! the gredins of English!"

"Well, I was brought up among them, anyway, and I'll do my duty to the Emperor to the last drop of my blood, against any other nation," said Louis, as he pulled up his horse, in a little carrefour, where four roads met. "But I've a right

to marry whom I like, and I've done it."

"Well there lies the high-road to Havre, and there that to Paris, so good-bye, *mon vieux*," replied his comrade, laughing as he struck his open palm into his friend's. "Bonne chance, and till we will meet on the Vistula."

"At Moscow, St. Ybars, en route for St. Petersburg. Good-bye."

Louis reached his destination. But the *Mutine*, a dashing frigate, loaded with guns and ammunition for General Rapp, did not sail just then. An English squadron hovered for weeks about, blockading the port of Havre, and it was only when a heavy gale, nearly amounting to a hurricane, had swept the English fleet off the coast, that she got under weigh, and shaped her course for the North Sea.

Captain Bouret, of the *Mutine*, was a tall, dark-visaged man, with a settled melancholy look about his eyes. His hair was grizzled by age, and yet this was only the second ship he had commanded.

"Thirteen years of his life," said Du Pitré, who had joined the frigate in charge of the artillery stores, as he leaned over the taffrail talking to Louis, the high-land of *La Hèvre* lying dim and shadowy astern. "Thirteen years of Bouret's life have been passed as lieutenant, and when he got the command of the *Goéland*, a ten-gun brig, his very first cruise ended by finding himself jammed down on the Irish coast and dismasted. He lost his brig, and nearly his life among those savages the Irish."

"Poor fellow! he may well look melancholy," remarked Louis.

"Burned out of one ship, blown up in .

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the mast-head almost at the same moment.

"A heavy ship some fifteen knots away," replied the Captain, fixing his glass on the stranger. "She seems to be bringing up a breeze with her too."

"If she should only prove a Russian," said Du Pitré. "A sea-fight would be new to us, Louis. I'd rather like it for once."

"New to you, not to me, Du Pitré. I would rather, for my part, yonder frigate showed the tricolour."

"Let me know when you can see her line of battery, Monsieur De Bourmont," said the Captain to his first officer.

But there was none of that calm quiet earnestness on the *Mutine's* decks which Louis had been accustomed to when going into action. The men crowded up from

another," continued Du Pitré, "that was the third time he had been shipwrecked, and he remained in prison for four years."

Du Pitré paused, for the man they were talking of came on deck and walked aft. The *Mutine* was a fine frigate carrying twenty-four guns, and a crew of three hundred and thirty men. Fourteen days after leaving port, she spoke a French sloop, and learned that war had broken out between France and Russia. The weather had been calm, and though she carried all sail to her royals, the frigate had made comparatively little progress. A good look-out was kept, for both Russian and English ships swarmed the northern seas.

"There's a sail, Captain Bouret," exclaimed Louis, pointing to the north-west.

"Sail ho!" shouted the look-out from

the mast-head almost at the same moment.

“A heavy ship some fifteen knots away,” replied the Captain, fixing his glass on the stranger. “She seems to be bringing up a breeze with her too.”

“If she should only prove a Russian,” said Du Pitré. “A sea-fight would be new to us, Louis. I’d rather like it for once.”

“New to you, not to me, Du Pitré. I would rather, for my part, yonder frigate showed the tricolour.”

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But there was none of that calm quiet earnestness on the *Mutine*’s decks which Louis had been accustomed to when going into action. The men crowded up from

below, they talked and chatted at quarters, peering out of the ports, and giving their opinions noisily. The magazines were thrown open, the shot lay piled between the guns.

“Monsieur De Bourmont, let the men have their dinners,” said the Captain, “the weather is clouding up to the westward, we shall have wind enough soon.”

“I say, Du Pitré, I’m for the fore-top yonder; will you come?” said Louis, as the boatswain’s pipe rang through the ship.

“Mon Dieu, no. I’m unsteady enough here,” replied the artillery officer, “but I would not get up there for all the world.”

Louis laughed, his old training had not been lost, and he ran up the shrouds like a sailor.

“The wind’s, coming down fresh and

fast, sir," said a topman as he made room for him. "There she yaws a little."

"Twenty-six guns," exclaimed Louis, as he counted the stranger's broadside. "Down on deck, sir," he continued, unconsciously using his old words of command, as he addressed a midshipman. "Down at once, and report that to Captain Bouret. There goes the beat to quarters."

"Ma foi, she's a whopper," replied the youth as he obeyed.

The stranger was now beginning to feel the force of the breeze, as she careened over, handing her royals smartly.

"In royals and top gallant stunsels; man the flying-jib downhaul," came the Captain's hoarse tones from below, as the dark green line of the coming breeze neared the ship, tearing along the sea.

The ready seamen swarmed aloft, the men on the topsail yards rigging in the booms, while the jib halyards being let go, the sail ran down its stay, the royal sheets were let fly, and the *Mutine* held her way under the same sail as the stranger.

“It will be time enough to run,” said Captain Bouret, addressing Du Pitré, as he paced the deck, rubbing his hands, “when we can’t help it. Brace up the yards a thought, *De Bourmont*, and show them the tricolour.”

The boatswain’s whistle was heard, the head braces were manned, the sheets hauled aft, and as the *Mutine* came luffing up to the wind, a jet of white smoke spurted from her bows ; it floated away to leeward, and the boom of a forecastle gun was heard, while the French tricolour blew out proudly at the mizen peak.

A dull heavy 'thud from the strange frigate followed quickly, the ball striking, and the sea, raising a shower of spray, went ricocheting from wave to wave, finally disappearing in the water a full mile short of the French frigate, while her colours were run up in reply.

"The Russian flag, I thought as much!" exclaimed the Captain, as he closed his glass, while a cry of "Vive l'Empereur" ran along the Mutine's decks.

The Russian frigate, the "Romanhoff," rapidly neared them, and when almost abreast of the Mutine fired a shot across her forefoot.

"You will have your wish, Du Pitré," said Louis, who left the top, and had walked aft to where the artillery officer was standing with Captain Bouret and De Bourmont.

The two ships were kept away, running north, nearly on parallel lines, and then the *Mutine* poured in her broadside, receiving almost at the same moment a destructive fire in return, the Russian balls tearing through the bulwarks and ripping up the planks, wounding several men with the flying splinters.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIGATE ACTION.

FOR fully an hour the two frigates continued pounding into each other, their heads to the northwards, and the Danish island of Bornholm lying to windward, while the breeze gradually freshened, coming in heavy squalls, accompanied by thunder and lightning.

“The Russian’s decks are swarming with men, Captain Bouret,” said Louis, as he stood by his side on the quarter deck.

“Well, if he tries to board, there will

be something for my fellows to do," said Du Pitré. "I'm sick of this kind of thing."

"The surgeon reports two officers and fifteen men down, sir," cried the first lieutenant, touching his cap.

The ships were enveloped in a cloud of smoke. The captain stood at the break of the quarter deck peering into it, watching the red spurts of flame as they darted out. From the main deck came the shouts and cheers of the men as they worked the guns noisily, the cries of the wounded, and the splintering crash of the rending wood, as the Russian balls ripped up the Mutine's decks. The silent dogged earnestness of the English sailor was absent.

"See, see, there she comes!" cried Louis, who in his excitement sprang forward, laying his hand on the Captain's

shoulder, and pointing to the smoke wreaths.

The Russian fire had ceased, and there, sure enough, above the smoke cloud, rose the tall tracery of her spars.

“Boarders to repel boarders!” shouted the captain; “Vive l’Empereur!”

“Vive l’Empereur!” cried De Bourmont, as, cutlass in hand, he sprang forward. A shrill scream of pain, and with the war-cry on his lips the first lieutenant fell forward on his face dead, a pistol-bullet through the brain, while the Russian’s jib-boom could be seen forging slowly along, when her whole broadside was given, and the Mutine’s main yard, shot away in the stays, fell on the booms.

The Romanhoff, all her spars standing, now ranged alongside, her anchor fluke catching the Mutine’s main-chains, while

her crew poured over her bulwarks on to the Frenchman's deck.

The fight was hand to hand now ; the pistol-shot only heard from time to time, the crunching sound of the cutlass as it cut through flesh and bone, the cries of the wounded, and the shouts and yells of the combatants ringing above the melee. The Russians, on the contrary, fought doggedly, obstinately, and almost in silence. Captain Bouret was wounded in three places ; seven of the marines lay on the quarter-deck ; the boatswain had piped his last call, while twenty dead and thirty wounded showed the deadly nature of the struggle.

Louis was hotly engaged with the Russian captain—a tall powerful man with yellow hair,—Du Pitré in the thick of the struggle with half-a-dozen of his artillery-

men, the cry of "Vive l'Empereur!" still to be heard.

No one had noticed the gathering storm, though it was about to break. The heavy firing, the first excitement of the fight, and then the hand-to-hand nature of the struggle, had precluded it. The Russians fell fast, yet as the first ranks went down, without a word their comrades took their places ; but a startling interruption was at hand.

Suddenly a deafening roar was heard right above the two frigates. One flash of lightning darted down from the sky above. The *Mutine* seemed to tremble to her keel ; then instantly came the roar of the thunder with the rending and splintering of wood, as the mizen mast, struck by the lightning, wavered for a moment, and, as the frigate lurched to port, came down with all its

gear, dragging with it the main top-gallant mast. There was a pause, then a cry was raised that the ship was on fire near the magazine. A loud explosion followed, as some of the cartridge between the guns blew up, and the Russian boarders became panic stricken. They turned and fled over the gangways, a general "sauve qui peut" following.

The Romanhoff let fall her courses, tore clear of her antagonist, and, firing a parting broadside as she did so, stood to leeward.

Springing aft, Louis nailed the tricolour to the broken stump of the mizen mast.

"Well, Du Pitré, have you had enough?" he asked, as the artillery officer, his face black with smoke, and his left arm dripping blood from a sword wound, joined him.

"If ever I get on shore again the devil

take me when I'm caught at this again," grumbled he ; "it's mere butchery."

The wind had chopped round during the squall to the south-west, and was soon blowing a gale, a long rolling sea setting in.

The wreck of the mast was cut away, the deck cleared, and a cheer burst from the French as the Russian's fore mast went over the side.

All that night the diminished crew worked on, the wind increasing to a gale, and the frigate running before it. When daylight dawned the wreck of the mizen mast was cleared, and the main yard, which had been shot away, fished, some spare studding sail booms and capstan bars having been used for the purpose,—the shot-holes plugged, the wounded attended to, the dead launched over the side, and when the dim light of morning crept over the sea,

a heavy south-westerly gale was blowing, and broad on the frigate's starboard bow a high rocky coast could be seen.

Captain Bouret, badly wounded, but refusing to go below, lay on a mattress on the quarter deck. Beside him stood the second-lieutenant, Louis, and Du Pitré.

"We have passed our port in the night," said the captain, "and I dare not heave the ship to or bring her to the wind."

"The masts would go over the side in a moment if we did, sir," said St. Lucie, the second-lieutenant. "They are badly wounded."

"Why not run in shore and anchor?" asked Louis, as the day wore on.

"We will try," replied Captain Bouret, as he gave the necessary orders. "It is our only chance."

By twelve o'clock the frigate had run close to the Russian coast, but the sea was very high and the gale had increased almost to a hurricane. At three o'clock, just as the necessary orders were being given to see the anchors clear, the *Mutine* struck on a shoal. In a moment the two remaining masts went over the side, killing and maiming several of her crew.

"Hold on," cried Louis, as he and Du Pitré clung to the stump of the mizen-mast, and an enormous green wave, tipped with foam, came rolling in from seaward. It struck the frigate's stern, poured over her decks and into her waist, washing overboard several of her crew, and carrying away the boats and the booms.

"Hurrah ! she's off," shouted St. Lucie, as the frigate surged over the shoal, rolling heavily, and driving towards the shore.

"She can't float long, Du Pitré," said Louis, "she's making water fast."

"It matters little to me," replied the artilleryman, "I can't help myself with this wounded arm."

"The rudder's jammed hard and fast," said St. Lucie. "God help us now!"

Again the long green waves came rushing on, burying the frigate in the salt water, and as it passed away, and she sank in the trough, the Mutine again struck the ground, and a scene of wild confusion took place.

All discipline was at an end; the guns on the quarter deck broke loose, tearing away the bulwarks as they drove to and fro. •

"Du Pitré," called Louis, placing his mouth close to the artilleryman's ears, "try and scramble forward; she can't

stand this long; she will part amidships."

"Go ahead. I'll do my best. Stay a moment, hold on, here it comes."

Once more the heavy sea struck the frigate, flooding the decks, and then driving her on towards land.

"Now for it," shouted Louis, and the two, hand in hand, dashed forward.

The Mutine lay on her starboard side, her gunwale under water, and it was only by clinging to bitts and rails that the two could advance slowly.

Many of the men had dropped into the sea, but only one or two had reached the shore, and by this time night was setting in.

"My strength is gone, Louis," said Du Pitré, as they reached the main chains.
"Never mind me. Save yourself."

A rope lay near, part of the rigging.

"Take this, Du Pitré; one more exertion and you are safe."

Louis, holding on with his right hand, was in the act of passing the rope round the artilleryman's body, when a sea struck the wreck. It poured over it and swept him from his hold. For a moment he was rolling about among broken spars and loose coils of rope, the next he felt himself seized by the hair and dragged upwards, and as he staggered to his feet he found he was on the forecastle.

"She has parted amidships," said the second lieutenant.

"And I owe you my life, St. Lucie," replied Louis, when he recovered breath.

Poor Du Pitré! Casks, broken spars, and splintered timbers, were floating round, for each wave now washed into the hold,

and even a strong swimmer could have no chance among the broken débris of the wreck, as the green seas rolled them to and fro like playthings. Not a trace of the artillery officer remained.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SAILOR'S TALE.

OF the whole ship's crew, the first lieutenant, Louis, and about twenty men, alone were left ; but the sea which had broken up the frigate had carried the remaining part of the wreck further in shore, and the bulwarks now gave some shelter to the survivors.

Still the situation was bad enough as night set in, and the gale howled and roared around them. It was a dark starless night, and the waves, as they broke over the wreck, poured from above over the

survivors of the Mutine's crew, drenching them continually. No provisions could be got at, and the suffering from thirst was dreadful.

"It must be near midnight now," said St. Lucie, "and I don't think the wind is as strong. You bear it well for a landsman."

"It's my second shipwreck," and, crouching under the lee of the bulwarks, Louis told of the loss of the Wyvern.

Towards morning the gale abated, and the moon shone out at intervals. They could see the sandy line of the Russian coast, with the white foam breaking on it.

"I was once worse off than this," said an old grey-haired seaman, who had lashed himself to the heel of the bowsprit.

"It's not easy to be that," replied St. Lucie.

"I feel strangely faint," said Louis. "I fancy I have broken some ribs."

"Don't give in, now that things look brighter," said St. Lucie. "The waves get up and go down quickly in these narrow seas. Listen, the thud as each one strikes what is left of the old bark is no longer so violent, and morning is near too."

"I'm not giving in, St. Lucie, but I feel very faint."

"Here, lend us a hand, Dumaine," said the lieutenant, seizing a rope which was dangling loose from the wreck of the foremast, "give him your place, he's wounded."

Cautiously, but with all a sailor's dexterity, the two lashed Louis to the heel of the bowsprit, and then once more, began the weary watch for morning, the gale

sighing and moaning overhead as it blew itself out. The lieutenant, anxious to keep up the men's courage, bethought himself of the old sailor's tale.

"You said you were once worse off than we are now, Dumaine," he said, "how was that? Spin us the yarn, my lad."

Officers and men were huddled closely together, for warmth, under the lee of the bulwarks.

"You must know," began the old sailor,* "that I owned and commanded a small sloop in those days. I was married, and my wife and five children lived on board the *Goeland*, which, though said to be a hundred years old, sailed regularly between Havre and Cherbourg. Well, we were standing away to the southward one day, with a close reefed mainsail, the wind

* See note iv., Appendix.

at north-north-east. We shipped some very heavy seas from time to time, and the sloop, as you may imagine, was very crazy. Still, I never thought there was any danger until my wife, who was below with her three daughters, called up the companion that the cabin was afloat. We sounded the well, and found, sure enough, she was full of water. We worked the pumps, but it was no use; the water gained on us hand over hand, and before morning the sloop fell over on her side."

"But why did you not get your wife and children on deck?" asked St. Lucie.

"My crew consisted of myself and my two lads, and I shouted to her over and over again, but she would not leave her girls, and so they were drowned."

"Had you no boat?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, a small punt. I jumped into it, and called to my lads to follow. The eldest had run to the companion to look for his mother once more, and he got his feet fast in the ropes, going down with the sloop. I ordered my last lad to spring into the sea, and he did so, but jumped short. I had only one oar, and that I threw him, and at last managed to haul him on board.

"Well, there we were, we two in an open boat, during a gale of wind, and not even an oar to guide her. We were thinly clad, and it was bitter cold. My boy felt it keenly, but the waves broke aboard us, and we were obliged to bale her out. About ten o'clock the next day, the youngster became delirious, and there he

lay at the bottom, raving and fancying himself with his mother on shore."

"But did not you sight any ships, Du-maine, and you so near shore?"

"We weren't six miles from it when the sloop went down bodily," replied the man, "but the current carried us out to sea. We saw several vessels, but not one saw us, and I had no means of signalling. When I wasn't busy baling out the punt, I took my lad in my arms, and hugged him close to me to try and warm him, but it was no use, and I was getting very weak. He died at last, and I laid him out at the bottom of the punt, and then stretched myself beside him to die too. Wasn't I right, shipmates? and wasn't I worse off then than we are now, shipwrecked though we be, and that too on an enemy's coast?"

"But how were you saved, Dumaine?"

"A Danish brig saw and picked us up, landing me at Cherbourg. I hadn't a penny in the world, or a relative left, and so I entered the service."

"And the boy?" asked Louis, who was breathing heavily, and who spoke with difficulty.

"I got them to take him on board too," replied the man, as he passed the cuff of his jacket across his face, all sodden with the salt water, "and whenever I get to Cherbourg, I don't forget to place a wreath on the gravestone."

"There's daylight," said St. Lucie, pointing to the east. "Hurrah!"

The sea had gone down as suddenly as it had got up, and there remained nothing of the late storm except the broken timbers of the frigate's forecastle, with the

wreck of the foremast lying alongside. The waves came rolling in, indeed, but without breaking, and by the time the sun rose over the land, the survivors of the crew could move about with safety.

"Can you get hold of some water?" asked Louis faintly, as he raised himself on his elbow, and the Mutine's lieutenant cast loose the lashings which secured him.

St. Lucie shook his head, and holding on by the splintered bulwarks, shaded his eyes with his hand.

"It's a sandy bay ahead of us," he said ; "with rocky headlands to starboard and port. Cheer up, comrade," he continued, as he saw Louis' pale face, and dry cracked lips. "We'll save you yet. Reeve a rope round me lads, and I'll try and swim to shore."

Watching the roll of the swell so as to avoid the pieces of wreck which were floating round, washed out from between decks, the men lowered their officer into the sea, casting him loose just at the right moment. With a cheering shout he struck out, and his comrades strained their eyes as they watched him.

"It's not more than half a mile to the shore," exclaimed the old sailor Dumaine. "Lower me away lads, too, and I'll try what I can do, old as I be."

"Look out!" shouted the men, as Dumaine struck out, and half-a-dozen barrels came surging out of the hold.

It was too late, for the swimmer was in the middle of them. A wild cry of "Save me! save me!" came to their ears, and the next moment the old sailor threw up his arms and

disappeared, just as St. Lucie gained the beach, staggered forward, and fell exhausted on the sand. A wild cheer burst from the men's lips, as they saw their officer rise, wave his hand, and take his way inland.

Louis was wandering in his mind soon, and, as the sun rose, the broken ribs pressing inward caused intense pain, while not a drop of water could be procured, to quench his raging thirst. He was at Navarre strolling with Ida along the banks of the Iton, and soon the sun rose above the land, pouring its full heat on the wreck, and no shade could be given him. The men did what lay in their power, tearing long strips of canvas, soaking them in the sea, and placing them on his forehead. Slowly and sadly the day wore on, the survivors peering out over the waves, and often

fancying they saw a distant sail, then looking anxiously to the land, and deceiving one another in their eagerness to discover a human form moving on the barren sandy shore, on which the waves now broke with a hollow thud. At intervals, in his delirious ravings, Louis asked piteously for water, but there was none to give him, and not a sign of coming help as the sun gradually sank in the west, fiery and red, with every indication of a gale of wind. Just as it dipped in the sea a small black speck was seen rounding the rocky headland. Anxiously those on board watched it as it rose and fell on the waves. A wild cheer burst from their cracked lips, and then the darkening twilight hid it from their eager eyes. The moaning of the coming gale could be heard aloft, and the seas

began once more to lap up angrily against the broken timbers. A shout from out of the darkness, the far-away creaking of the oars in the rowlocks, a loud hail from St. Lucie, and then the few survivors of the Mutine's crew knew that they were saved.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RUSSIAN BOYARD.

ON the high-road leading from the coast towards the town of Wilna, lay a Russian village, its houses looking black enough in contrast with the snow-covered plain. The month of November of the year 1812 had been unusually severe, and even the pine-forests were all covered with snow. Some distance from the village, and thrown back from the road stood a house of more pretensions than those about it. Built of pine-logs, laid one on another and clamped together, the interstices were stuffed with

moss which had grown, and fulfilled its office well. At the back of the house stretched the vast pine woods, and all round the country was deeply covered with frozen snow. There was not a sign of life save four black specks in the distance on the Wilna road, which an experienced eye would have at once made out to be four sledges travelling in the direction of the village of Krasnoi. The bells rang merrily on the sharp air, as the horses came dashing along, the leading sledge containing the owner, not only of the soil, but the people who tilled it, the Prince Golbinskov. The large doors of the house were thrown open, and the sledges driven into the courtyard. The stables and lofts for hay, straw, and provender, formed two sides of the square, the building itself the remainder; but the Prince Golbinskov was forced to stoop his head

low as he entered the narrow door, which was rapidly closed to keep out the cold.

There is always a disagreeable smell in the dwelling of the Russian peasant in winter, for the interior is studiously deprived of air from without. Some fowls were moving about the little ante-chamber, and the general room where the family met at meal-times was large and thoroughly warmed. There was not much furniture, a wooden divan running all round it serving for seats during the day, and, covered with matting, for a bed at night. The fire in the stove was never let to go out. Earthen jars, and kitchen utensils, lay scattered about, and a large table of planed wood stood in the centre. The lamp on it was an unusual luxury for a peasant's table.

While the party who had just arrived were noisily settling themselves, and the

skins and furs were being brought in—while the prince's intendant, for such the owner of the house was, welcomed his lord—let us pass into a small room, leading out of the public one. There was a stove in that room, too, and a window, whose lozenge-shaped panes were not of glass, but talc.

“But, Lednitz,” said Louis, for he it was who was lying on a mat on the floor, looking pale and thin, “I can't believe in your news. I have faith in the Emperor. Our army does not know defeat.”

“Well, I have no reason to love your nation,” replied the girl, speaking with difficulty, but in French. “It was your people killed my poor father, whose only crime was love for his country. Now they have burned Moscow, as they did our hut on the Danube.” Her fingers were

busy with the knitting-needles. "If my mother had not been Russian," she continued, "I should have been in a bad way when Lamarque's divisions swept over the land."

"And what made you learn our language then," he asked, raising himself on his elbow, "if you hate us so?"

The girl blushed, but did not reply, bending over her work.

"It is very cold," said Louis, rising, but doing so with difficulty, from weakness partly, but more from the weight of the thick sheepskin pelisse he wore. But she put down her knitting, and giving her arm, led him to the chair beside the stove. "How shall I ever repay you your care of me, Lednitz?" he said, as he took her hand.

The girl's brown eyes flashed. She

was just the Lednitz of the little hut on the banks of the Danube, except that she wore a loose mantle of dark fur over her dress, and a small coquettish cap of the same material, having a little aigrette in front.

“How singularly pretty she looks,” thought Louis.

“I remember well,” she said, breaking the silence—“oh! so well, the day we found you lying in the road there. We were yonder, my uncle and I,” and she pointed as she spoke to a verandah in trellis-work, which, as usual, ran along the front of the house, and where the family passed their nights and days during the short hot Russian summer.

“Yes, they placed me in a cart at first, and, when that broke down, drove us all in a flock of sheep. When one of

our party died, they made a fire, and pitched the body upon it, almost before the breath was out of it."

"They are a cruel race, those Cossacks ; but the French have provoked them to it," said Lednitz.

"When St. Lucie died at Zismory, and he was the only officer left of the whole of the Mutine's crew, they fastened a rope to his feet, and dragged him down the stairs of the house feet foremost, the head thumping against each stair. They are indeed a cruel lot, your Cossacks."

Lednitz shuddered, and plied her needles.

"I remember," continued he, "almost the last thing before I fell, asking the officer in command where we were going to. 'How should I know?' he replied, and he spoke French as well as I do. 'All that I can tell is that this is the high-road

to Siberia.' I remembered then, as he intended I should," continued Louis, "that I had a country and a wife, neither of which I should see again. Months have passed since that day; and but for you, Lednitz—but for you, I should have died where I fell."

The needles were very busy now, and if he had looked he would have seen that the girl's eyes were not dry; but just at that moment the sledges came jingling up, the bells ringing out on the sharp, dry, frosty air; then the bustle of the arrival followed, and a loud voice called Lednitz from the great room.

"Do you think you can walk to the dining-room?" asked the girl, as she put her knitting by.

"Oh! yes, if you will help me, I feel much stronger to-day."

Louis had been badly hurt when the wave dashed him forward into the Mutine's forecastle, as the frigate parted amidships ; and want of care had aggravated the injury, for the broken ribs had never been properly looked to. It was with some apparent difficulty he managed to reach the great room, where the guests were being obsequiously welcomed by Nigni, who was the Boyard's intendant.

A short, stout-built peasant, dressed in rough sheepskins, the calves of the legs swathed in thick cloth, while the shoes were wicker-work, made of the birch-tree bark. Such was Lednitz's uncle, outwardly, as he cringed servilely before his owner, the Boyard Ivan Golbinskov, a tall, sallow-faced man, who, as well as his wife, was closely wrapped in sables. Some

dozen servants were bustling around, arranging the table, and several large dogs were romping and playing about. In one corner a servant girl was lying, evidently ill, but no one seemed to care for her.

The Boyard's eyes followed Lednitz, as she made her reverence, and then went to the large stove, opened the door of the oven, and brought out several dishes, which had been stewing there in readiness.

"Our fare is poor, Prince," said Nigni, as he bent before the Boyard.

Soup, in which meat had been stewed, the latter being served apart; sourkrout, and balls made of mutton chopped fine, and mixed with force-meat. Then there came the tea, excellent of its kind; and the Boyard and his wife, like most Russians, did justice to the meal, abandoning the remains to the servants, who did not dare

to sit at the table, but crouched in a corner of the room, feeding with their fingers.

"You call it cruelty," said the Boyard, continuing the conversation as he lit his pipe. "But you have brought it on yourselves. Why did your army invade a country you had nothing to do with?"

"I have been very ill for months, Prince, having taken no part in the war," replied Louis, anxious to hear tidings from the army. "Is there any news?"

"Yes, plenty," replied the Boyard. "Your grande armée is a disorganized mass, driven before the spears of our Cossacks. But few will ever return to tell the tale of their march over our frozen plains."

The Boyard's wife had been speaking with the sick girl, who was her favourite *femme de chambre*. Laying her hand on his arm—

"Ivan," she said, "yonder girl is pinched with the cold. The sledges are uncovered, except that for your dogs. Let her have that. We have twenty miles to go yet."

The Boyard puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"Look," continued the lady, "she is burned up with fever, and I can't replace her, Ivan."

"Nonsense," answered the Russian noble, in surly tones, as he handed a pipe to one of the servants to be filled. "Nonsense, I'll find you a hundred women between this and Golbinskia, but how am I to replace my dogs if I lose one?"

His wife saw the justice of the remark, and turned away.

At this moment the unfortunate servant let fall the pipe, which was a valuable meerschau. For a moment the Boyard looked at the broken pieces, then broke out

into a torrent of abuse, the unlucky servant turning blue with fear. Then the Prince signed rapidly to his intendant, speaking a few words which Louis did not understand.

Nigni beckoned the culprit out, but Lednitz clasped her hands, appealing to him for mercy. Prince Golbinskov smiled, then stooped, whispering some words in the girl's ear, which caused her to flush crimson, and then turn very pale as she left the room hurriedly.

"Golbinskia is but five versts from this on the road to Saratof," he said, turning to Louis. "I am a fervent disciple of St. Hubert—come and stay with us. Nay, I will take no denial," he continued, as Louis was about to decline. "I will send a sledge for you to-morrow."

The screams of the unfortunate servant

were now heard, as, stripped to the waist, he lay on his face, two men under the surveillance of the intendant standing over him, striking into his flesh with long thin sticks.

The servants, as they got together the luggage, and bustled about the room, seemed not to notice the incident. It was one of every-day occurrence indeed.

“You are out of the world here,” observed the Prince. “But you ask me for news; I’ll tell you some. Well, when your Emperor marched out of Moscow for Malo Jaroslavetz, leaving Mortier with a division of six thousand men to blow up the Kremlin, he rode at the head of his Guard. Six hundred guns and two thousand artillery waggons followed him. Guns, caissons, and army, are lost. The Imperial Guard exists no longer, and Napoleon’s last

hope is that he may be permitted to reach Kowno and cross the Niemen in safety. Ney, with a few broken regiments, covers the road from Wilna, but Millowradowitsch, who commands our advanced guard, has detached a strong party unto the Hetman Platow, to occupy the road to Kowno. Within three days your Emperor will be a prisoner, for he precedes the army with only a feeble escort."

Louis uttered an exclamation of surprise and grief.

"Within a month you shall accompany me to Moscow, and I will show you your Napoleon working as a day labourer among its smoking ruins."

And the Russian Boyard held out his hand, as the servant who had been so severely punished crawled in on his knees to kiss it.

"To-morrow, Nigni, I send a sledge for this gentleman, and, hark you——"

The Boyard spoke a few words, and then walked out of the room, leaving his intendant mute and terror-struck.

In the adjoining one sat Lednitz, her face hid in her hands, and bent down on her knees. She was sobbing bitterly, as she rocked to and fro.

The Prince was the owner of the serfs on his estate, and her uncle had no power to resist the Boyard's dishonourable wishes.

"The morrow must see me at the Chateau of Golbinskia. No human power can help me," she sobbed.

"Fear not, Lednitz," said Louis, as he placed his hand on her head. "Listen to me," and he stooped down and whispered, so that no one could hear but herself.

“You don't fear to trust *me*?” he asked, as he concluded.

The girl lifted her head and looked at him, a bright joyful look on her face.

“The sledge will be here to-morrow, Lednitz, and the life you saved shall in its turn save your honour, and Napoleon's too,” exclaimed Louis, as he took her hand and pressed it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ESCAPE.

YEARS as they passed on, had brought with them a great change in Louis De Brissac's once plastic character. His early education as a child had enervated him, and a very delicate constitution had added to the faults engendered by his position. That life had, however, suddenly been changed. Misfortune had fallen on him, and his boyhood been passed among scenes of danger and strife both with man and the elements. His early nurture on the decks of the English smuggler and his

close association with the hardy English sailors had corrected what had been vicious in the past. Captain Leslie, the true type of the truthful simplicity of his class, had loved him, and had endeavoured to implant in him the contempt of danger, and affection for right and justice, which distinguished the seaman. The dogged, resolute, but fanatical Philip had added to his early training his quota. Then came the superior polish of the English navy, the officers of which, though rough and ready seamen, were gentlemen.

At length he had found himself left alone in the world without the guiding hand which had led him on hitherto. He lost both Philip and Leslie to find himself suddenly an actor in the great military drama Napoleon was playing out. Thus his mind took its tone from association

with the people among whom his early years had been spent, and the cruelty and injustice of the Russian Boyard disgusted him, while the double debt of gratitude he owed Lednitz made him choose his course at once.

Heavy clouds were rolling before a brisk northerly breeze when morning broke. The weather grew colder and colder as December set in, but there was no more snow as yet, and what did lie on the ground was hard and crisp. The wooden rollers of the sledge, though tipped with steel, had hardly left a visible track, when about eleven o'clock the next day, drawn by two splendid horses, it drove up to the intendant's door. Costly furs were heaped in the inside, and the cold, though very great, was still bearable.

"I can manage well enough," said Louis,

as he took his seat by the driver, "if I am only not smothered by these furs."

"Lednitz, just tell him that the bit of that horse is all wrong, will you?"

Opening the leathern covering just enough to speak, she did as she was asked, and the driver, placing the reins in Louis' hands, went to the horse's head. "Now for it!"

"Sit back!" he exclaimed, as he touched the fiery little horses with the whip, and with one bound they sprang forward, dashing at a mad gallop along the Kowno road. The driver was thrown down, but, supposing the horses to be running away, he jumped to his feet and followed the sledge, shouting and gesticulating. He was right, for all Louis could do to stop them now was perfectly useless. On they tore along the hard snow, the

light sledge whirled about as though it had been a feather, the wind cutting into the driver's face like a razor, muffled though he was in furs.

Lednitz had been thrown down, and lay among the piles of skins, but she was safe now, and no pursuit possible, for a time, at least.

They had gone some eight English miles before Louis got a pull on the reins, and at last succeeded in bringing the two horses to a trot. The sharp air, the exercise and excitement, had done him good, and, except that he was deficient in actual strength, he felt ready for anything. The road lay straight before them. Long ere they could reach Kowno, he calculated they would fall in with the advanced guard of the French army, and, despite all that had been told him, he refused to believe in

the utter disorganization of Napoleon's troops.

"I have them all right now," he said, as the leathern hood opened, and Lednitz's pretty face, muffled in furs, was seen.

"Remember, then, you leave me to speak if we fall in with Russians. You are Wallachian, and my servant," she replied.

"All right! I hope we shan't have a snow storm. It looks like it," and it did indeed look like it, for a more wintry scene can hardly be imagined. The long interminable plain, covered with white, dazzling the eyes when the sun shone out, the great pine forests looking like inky blots on the landscape, while the heavy clouds were rolling overhead, and flocks of ravens rose from the skirts of the forest

land. The birds were busy, apparently exploring great mounds, which, whatever they contained below, were now covered by the snow. The wind was rising, and seemed to become more and more piercing as the sledge glided silently on over the hard frozen surface. What was worse, it swept before it the fine hard particles which filled the eyes and rendered it very difficult for anyone to see. It was a north-easterly wind, and came sweeping over the vast ice-bound regions of North Russia.

Louis had quite determined on his course, and neither ice, snow, nor biting north-easters could influence his determination. The Russian Boyard's red beard and stolid cruel face was an antidote to all minor evils.

“ There come the first snow-flakes,

Lednitz," he said, as he pointed with his whip towards the north. "We are in for it now."

"Oh! how very beautiful the pine forests look, their dark branches bending under their covering of snow," exclaimed the girl, as she cautiously peeped from an opening in the sledge hood.

"Aye, but we shall have a snow-storm soon, and the way is hard enough to find even now," was the reply. "See, the sun is sinking too, and, except the flocks of ravens wheeling round us, not a sign of life is seen. It is very desolate."

He was right, for the wind gradually rose with a moaning sound as it swept through the pine woods, while the snow, falling more and more quickly, soon obliterated all traces of the road.

Still the wiry little nags, true to their

breeding, trotted along, their bells jingling, while the sledge glided smoothly over the even surface of the vast plain.

"We can't see twenty paces ahead," exclaimed Lednitz, as she once more peeped out from between the leathern curtains. "We shall never find the track ; but oh, Louis ! you are a perfect pillar of snow !" and the girl laughed.

"Never fear," he exclaimed, laughing also, despite the gravity of the position, as he cracked his whip, and shouted cheerily to the horses, "never fear ; and I'd rather lose our way in the snow than be on the road to the chateau of that red-bearded thief, Golbinskov."

She looked very grave, and shuddered. "Look, Louis !" she exclaimed suddenly, "look, there are men at last. See, there they are, sitting round a fire

yonder, under the shelter of the pines : there, to the eastward of that clump of trees."

Checking the horses, and shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed eagerly in the direction pointed out, the snow falling in such heavy flakes that though the object which Lednitz called men was not twenty yards away, he could hardly see them, certainly not make out what they were.

"Why, there are some fifty of them," he exclaimed, "and they are squatted round a fire."

"They must be asleep ; be cautious, Louis, they may be French," she said. "What can human creatures be doing out in such weather ? and their fire gone out, too. They don't move, and yet they must see us. Oh ! Louis, remember you are my only hope now. Be cautious."

But caution was not one of the young soldier's virtues. Throwing the reins to Lednitz, who looked alarmed, he jumped to the ground. For a moment he paused beside the steaming horses, for the excessive cold had cramped his limbs,—then, a cocked pistol in his hand, he advanced towards the motionless group.

“Covered as I am with Golbinskov's costly furs,” he muttered, as his feet sank in the snow, “I feel the cold severely. With the fur hood drawn over my face, barely allowing me to use my eyes, the driving snow blinds me; how, then, can men brave the cold thus with impunity? They must be Platow's Cossacks.”

The rays of the setting sun struggled out as he neared the group of sleeping men. It glinted over the snow-covered branches of the pines, flashing from their

frozen covering in dazzling prismatic colours. It lighted up feebly for a moment the tattered remains of the uniforms of the sleeping men. Louis de Brissac was once more with the Imperial Guard. He called to them in surprise, but not one moved, though the snow was heaping itself silently but surely around them. Again he shouted, and as he did so a cloud of ravens rose from a snow-covered mound near. He shuddered, for he had passed many similar mounds, and wondered what they were, never for a moment thinking that there, sleeping their last sleep, lay the war-worn veterans of the Imperial Guard,—the men of Wagram and of Austerlitz. There they sat, just as they had fallen asleep around the fire, frozen into stone, the rags which remained of their uniforms covered with old sacks or undressed sheep-

skins. Not a sign of food lay near, but from among the embers human bones protruded, calcined by fire, showing where—in their agony from starvation and cold—men had cast themselves into it, and so perished miserably. As he gazed horror-stricken, a blast of wind stronger than usual came sougning through the trees, shaking the snow in masses from the overladen branches, the frozen human figures falling before its force just as stone statues would have done, retaining exactly the position in which they had died. The startled ravens rose, circling round uttering discordant cries, and a dull, heavy, continuous thud came borne on the breeze.

“It is the boom of the artillery,” muttered he, as, with a cold shiver, he turned and worked his way through the snow to where the sledge stood.

“It is very, very horrible ; but still it is better than the saloons of the Chateau Golbinskov, Lednitz,” he said as he told the tale of what he had seen ; and then, after shaking the masses of snow from the leathern covering of the sledge, jumped to his seat, and with a shout cheered on the wiry little horses over the plain toward the south.

“All this misery I might have had to answer for,” thought Louis to himself, as mile after mile was passed, the snow becoming more and more blinding, and the horses showing at last symptoms of fatigue. “All this I might have had to answer for, had Philip succeeded in his plans. Better, far better as it is. If I can warn the Emperor, place Lednitz in safety, and rejoin Ida—good-bye, ambition. Ha ! what is that ?” he exclaimed, as a

bright blaze shot up above the pine forest.

It was night now, but the whitened surface of the plain prevented it being very dark.

“To the right, Louis! to the right!” cried Lednitz, as, startled by the sudden blaze, the horses came to a standstill, snorting with terror; “it is from the town of Kowno.”

“Then it must be occupied by the Russians, the French would not burn it,” replied Louis. “See how the tongues of flame leap up into the night, and listen, Lednitz, that is the roar of the Russian artillery. An hour since, it was a distant grumbling noise; listen to it now.”

Yes, it was plain enough, as crash after

crash came booming on the night, the sound deadened by the falling snow.

"The Hetman Platow has turned Kowno, and the Emperor is caught like a rat in a trap, Lednitz. We are too late, too late!" exclaimed Louis, as he touched his horses with the whip, and turning to the right, entered the pine forest, through which a long white line denoted the road.

"We can yet turn back. It is not too late for that," replied she, her pale face lit up by the reflection of the fire.

"With Chateau Golbinskov in the distance? No, Lednitz, no; we can at least die with the Emperor, if we can't save him. Anything except the tender mercies of that red-haired Boyard."

The cheering shout was heard again as

he once more urged the horses forward among the black stems of the pine trees, the long white track, over which the sledge moved so noiselessly, looking like a river, the reflection of the blaze giving it a reddish tinge. A few minutes more, and they would be clear of the trees, for beyond them, they now knew, lay the great highway from Wilna to Kowno, while, a few miles to the south, the frozen waters of the Niemen would afford a safe passage across the frontier.

Yes, a few minutes, and they would, perhaps, be among the débris of the grande armée, seeking safety, also, from the icy winter of the north.

“Forward!” shouted Louis, as he urged the tired horses on. “Forward!”

Suddenly, a score of musket shots rang out, the bright flashes spurting here and

there among the forest trees. With a scream of pain the horses fell forward on the snow, reddening it with their blood, while the sledge, preserving the impetus given it, first struck against the fallen animals, and then rolled over on its side, throwing its driver heavily. Struggling to their knees, the horses strove to rise, but it was useless.

A crowd of men surrounded them, and before he could regain his feet, almost before the animals were fairly dead, using their swords as knives, a hundred hungry men were fighting and quarrelling over the carcasses, some devouring the steaming meat raw, others, not quite so famished, bearing it away.

“Pardon, mon brave!” exclaimed a colonel of Voltigeurs, as Louis remonstrated angrily at the treatment, while he

extricated Lednitz from the now useless sledge. "It is forty-eight hours since we tasted food, and listen to the music yonder. It's no time to stand on ceremony."

The thunder of the Russian guns seemed indeed very close to where they stood.

"But the Emperor, where is the Emperor?" asked Louis, eagerly, as he passed his arm round the frightened Lednitz.

The Voltigeur colonel could not speak. His mouth was full of the uncooked meat, but he pointed with his sword to the blazing houses, just as a crowd of fugitives came hurrying along. Men, officers, camp-followers, and women, one dense disorganised mass, driven on like sheep before the Cossack spear heads, and borne away by the crowd. Struggling for life in the

middle of the excited mass, Louis, still clasping Lednitz in his hold, was hurried helplessly towards the blazing streets of Kowno.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PASSAGE OF THE NIEMEN.

KOWNO was but an insignificant frontier town, but large quantities of army stores had been heaped there. While the *grande armée* was starving, the houses were turned into granaries, the wheat, flour, clothing, and spirits, of which Napoleon's troops stood in such need, being massed there in enormous quantities. The two great tacticians — Generals Frost and Snow — had thrown the whole of the usually well-managed French commissariat out of gear, and when the news of the total demoralisa-

tion of the army on the banks of the Beresina reached the town, earthworks for its protection were hastily thrown up by the engineers. On these being held, the safety of the broken army now depended, and at the moment when the spears of Platov's Cossacks drove the remnant of Napoleon's guard down its blazing streets, their guns opened fire, for the Emperor was yet there, waiting the reports of the scouts, who had been sent out to ascertain if the Niemen was sufficiently frozen over to bear the weight of men and horses.

The river, which, a few months before, Napoleon had crossed at the head of an army of five hundred thousand men, lay in the rear of the town, and as it formed the frontier line, the safety of the battered

remains of the great army depended upon its state.

The bullets came singing through the air, now and then plunging into the massed crowd of disorganised fugitives, as, breathless and panting, Louis at last cleared the crowd, and drew the frightened girl under the shelter of an old stone porch. Just at that moment the noise of a shell was heard, as the various batteries opened fire, and the missiles passing overhead fell with deadly effect among the Cossack ranks, another and another following.

“Come along,” cried an artillery officer, who had sought the same shelter—“Now’s the time to gain the river. It is frozen over. Come along!”

“The Emperor—where is the Emperor?” cried Louis, as, regardless of personal safety, he once more endeavoured to cross

the street. "We must find him, at all hazards, Lednitz!"

The houses were burning fiercely now, sending up a ruddy glare into the falling snow; the shells came whizzing overhead with that groaning noise peculiar to them, the patter of the musketry seemed continuous, while the cheers of the Cossacks, who had penetrated between the main body of the French, under Ney, and the town of Kowno, were heard above the uproar.

To the north the continuous boom of the heavy guns told how hard the Russians were pressing on Ney's columns. The earthwork in front of the gate opening on the Wilna road, checked with its fire the Russian advance, and on its being held by the handful of Bavarian artillerymen under Prince Beauharnais,

depended the Emperor's escape. From this work shot and shell were rained on the Russians, mowing them down by hundreds, while Platov's Cossacks endeavoured to turn the rear of the town, and thus take Napoleon as in a net.

"The Emperor—where is the Emperor?" cried Louis as he struggled on.

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"In yonder house," replied an officer of Murat's hussars, pointing with his sword to a street leading out of the main thoroughfare. "Tell him," continued the wounded man, as he staggered and pressed his hand to his side—"Tell him the river is frozen hard and fast. Tell him the Hetman's Cossacks—"

But the sentence was never finished. The hussar fell as he spoke, and the next moment was ruthlessly trampled under foot.

The tumult was frightful, and Lednitz too terrified to utter a word, as Louis endeavoured to extricate himself from the press. It was no place for a girl, for the flying French had become wholly demoralised. The stores, which should have long since been sent to the front, had been rifled, and, unfortunately, the casks of rum had been found. Long deprived of stimulants, the soldiers refused to obey their officers — nay, in many cases shot them down, then broke into the warehouses, rolled the casks into the streets, and, staving them in, drank the fiery liquid. Men of every arm were there — infantry, cavalry, artillery, camp-followers, mad drunk. A dragoon's helmet served one group as a drinking-cup, a horse-bucket another; but in their fury the staved casks were overturned, and the

liquid flooded the streets. What mattered, more was at hand ; but that, too, shared the same fate, and soon a river of liquid flame ran along the streets of Kowno. Half-burned wretches crawled out of it, scores of men perished miserably, and houses, stores, and public buildings became one universal blaze. Roof after roof fell in with a dull crash, sending up clouds of sparks, which in their turn fired other houses. In many places beams of blazing, half-charred wood had fallen forward across the streets, striking down the passers-by, whose groans and screams were unheeded by their flying comrades.

“Have you any tidings?” asked a hussar officer, whose dolman was torn and rent, and his head covered with a close-fitting cap of fur.

“I have ; where is the Emperor?”

replied Louis, as he turned into the byestreet the dying officer had pointed out.

Murat, for he it was who spoke, turned quickly a few more steps, and they stood before Napoleon. He seemed wholly unmindful of the tumult around him. A peloton of hussars sat on their chargers before the door of the house, men and animals white with snow, half-a-dozen led-horses were being walked to and fro in the street. On the steps of the mansion, sheltered by its stone portico, and wrapped in a long fur dressing-gown, stood Napoleon. His figure was stouter than when Louis had last seen him, his face, pale, nearly to lividness, and it was evident he was just about to mount his horse.

“Your news, sir?” he asked, turning

to the new comers, and speaking in a sharp, harsh voice.

“The Cossacks of Hetman Platov are rapidly surrounding Kowno, sire. Their orders are to pass the Niemen, and even to occupy the heights beyond. A few minutes more, and retreat will be impossible. Haste, sire, haste.”

“Will the river bear? If not, we will hold Kowno at all risks. Do you know that, sir?”

“Yes, sire, horse and man; but mount, mount and ride, sire, or it will be too late.”

“Away to Prince Eugene,” exclaimed Murat, as Napoleon swung himself heavily into the saddle. “Tell him the Emperor’s orders are to keep the Wilna road at all risks, till Ney falls back.”

The clattering of horses’ hoofs, the

hoarse word of command, as Buonaparte and his suite rode down the street, avoiding the main thoroughfare.

“Hallo! De Brissac!” exclaimed a voice, as the officer in command of the escort suddenly reined in his horse by his side. “Don’t you know me, mon vieux?”

“St. Ybars, by all that’s glorious! Henri, do me one last service. I ask it in the name of old friendship.”

“A score, mon brave, but speak quickly.”

“Here, then, take Lednitz behind you, save her, Henri.”

“Never!” exclaimed the girl, who had shrunk away abashed by the presence of the Emperor.

A loud explosion, which shook the very ground under their feet, took place. The

fire had reached a magazine, and the tiles and beams of the houses near came clattering down on to the pavement. For a moment a dead silence succeeded the tumult, then one by one the guns again opened fire.

“Never! where you go, I follow. For the love of the Madonna,” prayed Lednitz — “for the love of that Ida you have so often told me of, let me stay.”

“This is no place for you,” he replied sternly. “Away, away, St. Ybars!”

The next moment the hussar’s powerful arm was round her. With one swing she was before him, and then putting spurs to his charger, he dashed at a hand gallop down the paved street, leaping the obstacles in his way, while Louis turned to fulfil the mission he had received.

“Half-an-hour, only half-an-hour, and the Emperor will be saved!” he muttered to himself, as he took his way to the earthwork at the Wilna-gate, where Prince Eugene’s artillery still kept up a steady fire. Avoiding the centre of the street, and sheltering as best he could under the walls and houses, he stopped from time to time as the chimneys, and sometimes the buildings before him came tumbling to the ground with a crash, the singing of the shells, and the more distant boom of Ney’s artillery sounding painfully distinct.

“Vive l’Empereur!” he shouted, dashing at a run into the earthwork. “Fire low, men, fire low!” he cried, as after delivering his message, he snatched up the sword of a dead Bavarian officer. Led-

nitz was safe, and now all his thoughts were concentrated on the scene around him.

The woods in front were crowded with Russian infantry, the shells from the earth-work falling among their serried ranks with frightful regularity, tearing and rending whole companies. On they came in spite of all, stern and unflinching, facing the storm of shot and shell, a dense mass of men, their resolute faces plainly seen in the red glare of the blazing town, a cloud of Cossack riders on either flank.

“Mark that fellow, De Brissac!” cried Prince Eugene, pointing with his sword to an officer who headed the charge. It was Hetman Platov’s son, but it was too late. The roar of human voices, the crash of the guns as they drove their iron hail at

point-blank range through the Russian ranks, then the enemy were among them, and the defenders of the earthwork fighting hand to hand with an overpowering foe.

A minute later and Beauharnais, borne away by the rush, was riding for his life to the rear, while the remnant of the Bavarians and Imperial Guard fell fighting man by man.

“Vive l’Empereur !” came once more the feeble shout.

“The half-hour is won,” muttered Louis, as a shattering volley rang out, and staggering forward, his sword fell from his hand. Yes, it was won ; Napoleon had crossed the Niemen, and was safe, while the blazing town gradually burned itself out, and the thunder of the Russian cannon ceased, while snow fell steadily and fast

on a heap of broken arms, dismounted guns, and mutilated human forms inside the battered earthwork on the Wilna road.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WIFE'S FAREWELL.

MALMAISON had been respected, though the allied army lay encamped round Paris, and the Cossack spears were to be seen in her streets, while the English infantry stood to arms in the Champs Elysées. Napoleon was a prisoner, and France, worn out by war, with her male population decimated and destroyed, almost welcomed her conquerors. The Empress Marie Louise troubled herself little about the matter, but with Josephine it was different.

The lower part of the chateau had never been altered, but remained exactly as Napoleon had left it. Beautiful statuary from Italy; tables in mosaic from Venice; strange clocks in lapis lazuli and agate, with gems of pictures and chef-d'œuvres of bronze, and Sèvres china. Costly tapestries were there, and many of the works of art had been taken from the galleries of Madrid, Vienna, or Berlin. Still Josephine's name sufficed to protect all these, but nothing could form a greater contrast to this luxury than the simplicity of her own rooms.

Sorrow had fallen on her. She mourned for Napoleon, and for France; but that was not all, for illness had come too. A severe cold, caught days before, had been neglected, and such rapid progress had it made, that Josephine knew that, despite

the consoling assurance of her doctors, her time was short on earth.

There she lay in the bed whose white muslin curtains were thrown open. At a table close by sat Ida Caraccioli, bending over a sheet of paper and writing busily. So quiet was the evening that the scratching of the pen could be heard. Lying back on the pillows, Josephine dictated her last wishes, speaking in a low faint tone. The words ran thus :

“ MY DEAR HUSBAND,

“ For the last time your Josephine addresses you, for when this reaches its destination I shall be no more. Knowing that I am sick unto death, I give myself this last supreme consolation. I will not think of the past. All that is the domain of history now, and I respect your regrets,

as I do your misfortunes ; but if while I was your wife I had the right to speak the truth, surely in the sad state I now am, you will recognize only in my words the proofs of that deep attachment you must ever have given me credit for, and which has made you, I really believe, love me, even when I ought to have been nothing to you.

“Precipitated by an awful series of calamities from the first throne of Europe, you have become an example to the world of the strange vicissitudes of fortune, and your fall will ever stand forth as a lesson to Kings and Emperors.

“Once the mighty ruler of Europe, you are now alone in an island, not far from the Corsica which saw your birth, and close to that Italy, whose soil your armies have so often trodden as conquerors. Small in-

deed is such a spot for one who found Europe a field not vast enough for his ambition. A strange contrast such isolation must be to the splendour of the brilliant court which once surrounded you, and need indeed will there be of all your courage to withstand the shock.

“Be wise, my husband, and let not adversity beat you down. Forget the phantom of past glory, and let the past be to you as a dream. Think not of the future, but live in the present, and, doing so, you will earn the admiration of all who have their eyes fixed on you.”

Josephine paused, from emotion and weakness, and Ida rose, going to the door, where one of the attendants handed her a glass. Bending over the bed, she gave it to the Empress, who drank it eagerly; then sitting down she waited, pen in hand

her pale face turned towards the dying woman. The ticking of the clock was heard, the song of the thrushes in the woods of St. Cucuphat, and then came the low quiet tones once more.

“Now that Europe can contemplate you without fear,” she continued, “show the world by the wisdom with which you rule yourself and the little island you live in, that if you have been sometimes led astray by prosperity, yet in adversity you can be dignified and calm.

“Think not, my husband, of the great part you have played in the world during the last sixteen years ; but find, or create, occupations, in your narrowed circle, which will fill up the void around you, and so make your solitude pass pleasantly, while awaiting what futurity may have in store for you.

“Good bye. Do not regret my death. Good bye for ever. I shall die happy now, since I have had the satisfaction of dictating this letter. Dear Napoleon, dearest husband—farewell.”

The wife's letter was finished.

“You will give it to him, Ida,” murmured Josephine, as she fell back exhausted. “In my dressing-case you will find a packet—bring it me.”

The crunching of wheels on the gravel was heard outside, as Ida obeyed. It was Eugene and Hortense Beauharnais, who had been summoned in haste.

“They are the papers which would have proved your husband's succession. Napoleon gave them to my charge to be placed in the hands of the Pope. Use them as you like,” muttered Josephine feebly, as

Ida stooped over and pressed her lips on her forehead. "Are they arrived?" she asked querulously.

A few hours later Monsieur Horan, the physician, stood by the bedside. His face was very grave as, watch in hand, he counted the rapidly-failing pulse. Opposite him knelt Eugene, while Hortense was sobbing bitterly, and Ida, a small glass in her hand, bent over the bed, as she put aside the white curtains from the pillow.

Josephine spoke with difficulty now, and it required powerful self-control in Eugene to restrain the grief that threatened to convulse his frame; while his sister, making no such effort, her hair dishevelled, her face swollen and wet with tears, gave full scope to her grief. Every moment respiration became more and more difficult; and

as a servant who had entered whispered some words and retired, he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed audibly. The man told that the Emperor Alexander of Russia was pacing the galleries below. He was to have dined with Josephine this day, and there with his brilliant staff he waited, walking to and fro, for no one heeded him.

Josephine's lips parted. It was very difficult to hear her voice now, so low had it become. Hortense restrained her sobs, and bent over to catch the words.

"At least," muttered Josephine—"at least I shall die regretted. I have done what I could for France."

Again the door opened--Louis XVIII. had sent his minister to ask Josephine's presence at his Court, but a more pressing

invite had arrived. The hands were plucking at the coverlet now, the words, "Napoleon," "Elba," came in faint tones from her lips.

Through the door, which had been left open, and outside which were a number of weeping attendants, passed two men into the darkened room. One wore a brilliant Russian uniform, the other that of the Imperial Guard. Josephine's eyes lighted up as the Czar stood by the doctor's side.

"At least," she murmured, as a smile passed over her countenance, "at least I can say with truth to you all, in these my last moments, that Napoleon's first wife never caused a tear knowingly to be shed by her fault."

The tongue seemed to refuse its office, the labouring breath came more faintly—

at longer intervals—then seemed to cease. “Poor Napoleon—Elba—Elba,” she murmured, the words coming faintly, more like a far-away whisper than the human voice.

Then the loud ticking of the clock became painfully audible. The doctor returned the watch to his pocket, and replaced gently under the clothes the hand he held. A wild burst of grief from Hortense, as the Emperor Alexander led her from the room, and the weeping attendants stole into it, to look once more at the face of their Empress.

An arm passed round Ida’s waist as she rested her face on the pillow.

“Ida—wife,” came the words breathed into her ears.

No one heeded them at that moment, no one even heard the cry which burst from

her lips as, clasped in her husband's arms,
Ida, her head resting on his bosom, wept
for sorrow, tempered even then by a great
joy.

CONCLUSION.

“**K**EEP them, Ida! Keep them, wife! Tempt me not with the papers, and with the mad visions of a throne. Remember your own words among the broken columns of the Temple of Serapis. ‘The race of the Bourbons,’ you said, when my arm encircled this waist for the first time—‘The race of the Bourbons is condemned by God and man. The world will soon be one great Republic—one vast family.’ Well, Ida, so be it; and in lieu of a throne, let us choose the empire of ourselves, and wait patiently the coming time.”

Reader, if ever your footsteps led you to the quiet village of Reuil, close to Paris, once the dwelling-place of the princely Richelieu, enter its little church, and you will soon stand, as Louis and Ida stood the morning when the words quoted above were spoken, as they dropped the first wreath of immortelles upon the slab of grey stone, which then alone marked the grave of the Empress Josephine. A marble tomb, placed there by the wish of Eugene and Hortense Beauharnais, will meet your gaze now, but on the day when the two stood there, the marble was not even thought of; and yet on that spot the lineal descendant of a line of kings renounced the throne of the Bourbons, and by his own free will glided into an obscurity, from which the veil has never been lifted, creating a deep dark chasm

between the names of the Sixteenth and that of the Eighteenth Louis, and leaving a secret known only to the Church of Rome.

“We will fully carry out her wishes,” continued Louis, speaking in the quiet firm tone habitual to him, as he placed the wreath on Josephine’s grave. “We will send these documents, sealed up, to the Vatican, as matters for future history, not for present use; and now give me that hand, Ida, and listen to me, dearest.” His arm was round her waist, and her head leaned on his shoulder. “When I lay all through that dreary night, wife, unable to move,” he said, “the snow-wreath rising higher and higher around me, with the glare of the blazing houses of Kowno in my eyes, the shrieks of the wounded and the boom of the guns in my ears, things

seemed different to me than they had before."

He paused.

"I formed one of a heap of dying and of dead," he continued, after a pause. "I could feel the mass of slaughtered humanity heaving beneath me, as some half-dead wretch strove to free himself from the seething pile. All these had died to purchase one half-hour's respite for Napoleon."

Ida shuddered, and drew herself closer to him, as though for protection.

"Poor—poor Louis!" she murmured, as she looked up into his face.

"At that moment," he continued, in a firm tone, "I renounced ambition. I determined to keep the promise made on the banks of the Iton."

"Dear — dearest husband!" came the low sweet tones to his ears.

“And when at last morning dawned over the wrecked town, the pine-forests all silvery white, and the dark earth-work before, and within which the dead lay piled by hundreds, a search was made. Not for me. I might have lain there till now, for aught either Napoleon or Alexander cared. You might have been a widow, Ida ; what was that to them ? Thousands were made by that one war alone, begun without aim, save personal ambition. No, they sought the old Hetman Platov’s son, the man who had three times led the assault on Kowno, and who lay dead beneath me, with a Bavarian bullet through his heart. I saw the red-bearded, grim old Cossack father’s grief as I was dragged forth from the pile of dead and dying, that he might look on the dead face of his only child. All this came on me with great vividness, Ida, as I

lay through that terrible night, the snow falling, and the houses burning around me. My past life as a soldier seemed stripped of its tinsel then; and what were thrones and empires to me at that moment! I yearned for your love, Ida—for that alone; and my promise on the Iton's bank came before me, as though written in words of fire."

Again he paused; then once more continued, in the same earnest tones—

"The mad ambition which had led to all this seemed to me as it had never done before, a monstrous iniquity; and yet it was to save the man who had done all the evil that I lay there, fool that I was! Not only had I sacrificed myself, but you. Well, they found me while searching for the Hetman's son, and then came long months of hopeless aimless captivity—

hearing news of France rarely. It was thus, while at Saratov, I learned St. Ybars had married Lednitz. It gladdened me ; but then came rumours of the fatal fight of Leipsig, and the news of Henri's glorious death by Poniatowski's side."

" And did you never hear of her more ?" asked Ida, as she nestled her head closer to his breast.

" Yes, dearest, once, and once only. She came to Saratov to realise her uncle's property. He had been so severely flogged by that scoundrel Golbinskov, that he died from the effects of the knout. She was the mere wreck of the gay happy girl I first saw on the Danube's bank. Then came the march on Paris ; and it was thought I might be useful, and, thus as a paroled prisoner, I became attached to Alexander's staff. The Czar noticed me,

in consequence of the Empress Josephine's frequent inquiries about my fate, and so I entered France once more, but only to witness her desolation and humiliation, brought on by the ambition of her ruler. And now, dearest, we will live for ourselves, in that England, whose countrymen fostered and protected my boyhood, and without whom you and I, Ida, would never have met."

And so, hand in hand, they knelt by Josephine's last resting-place, and then passed out of Richelieu's chapel into the busy world, once more, to lose themselves in the ever-flowing stream of life.

APPENDIX.

NOTE I.

IN the Imperial Library, the copies of the depositions of the medical men employed by the Convention to examine the body of the boy who died in the prison of the Temple, are to be found. The original papers, proving it to have been one substituted in the place of the true dauphin, are, it is stated, yet among the archives of the Vatican, having been sent there after the downfall of the first Napoleon. The document signed by the medical men, who made the autopsy, runs thus :—

“ We proceeded to examine the corpse of a youth, shown to us by the Commissaries, and which was stated by them to be that of the son of Louis Capet.”

The signatures of this ambiguous document

are those of Doctors Pelletan, Dumangin, and Lassas, all noted men of their day. The two medical men who had previously attended the dauphin, had both died suddenly a short time before. It is stated by poison, because they must have infallibly recognised the fraud practised, but even, after their removal, the men chosen by the Convention would only certify to the autopsy in the cautious manner related.

Among the official documents bearing on the De Richemont trial, to be found at the Palais de Justice, is the evidence given by one of these very men. In course of examination, he stated that he did not believe the body he had examined to be that of the dauphin. When more closely pressed, he said, on his oath, that it was not. This answer stands recorded in the official journal of that day.

The burial was secret, and more than a month later, the Government quietly arrested children of ten years of age, in various parts of France, bringing them to Paris to be examined. Thus, Monsieur Morin De Guirénier, in a pamphlet, still to be found in the Imperial Library, gives a detailed account of his adventures when placed under arrest at that age, because of his resemblance to the Lost Prince. A second brochure is

also to be found there, written by a native of Orleans, seized by the police of that town. He had with him a lad of ten years old, and when he expressed his indignation, was told, "You don't know then, that the young Capet has escaped from the Temple."

On the 2nd of December, 1794, three officials were sent to see the boy prisoner. Here is their account of the interview, attested by the signatures of Messrs. Matthieu, Reverchon, and Armand, all three zealous Republicans.

"The dauphin remained seated, his elbows on the table, his face rigid and unchanging, even the eyes betraying no knowledge of our presence. He showed no emotion, no feeling. His dinner was brought, and he eat it mechanically. [I asked him, was he content?—no reply. Would he like some fruit?—still silent. If he could eat grapes?—no answer. Some being brought, he eat them greedily. Would he like more?—no answer, and ever the same fixed unmeaning look remained on his face, and he kept, to the close of our interview, determined silence. Every endeavour on our part to get a word from him, signally failed."

Some letters from one of the dauphin's guardians throw a strong light on this strange demeanour, which evidently greatly puzzled the three delegates. The first runs thus :—

“GENERAL,

“Your letter of the 6th came too late. The first project had been carried out, and it was time, for to-morrow the new guardian comes. I am greatly puzzled how to convey eatables to ‘our prisoner,’ but rest assured I shall manage it. The municipals don’t suspect that the mute has replaced the boy king. How shall we get the latter clear away? Barras can’t help us, as he is so closely watched. His, the dauphin’s sister, knows nothing of this. I always speak to her of the mute as her brother. He is well in health, and plays his part capitally. The new guardian fully believes he is obstinate, and won’t speak, so there is no danger.

“LAURENZ.”

“TOWER OF THE TEMPLE,

“7th November, 1794.”

But Laurenz was destined to be rudely aroused from his dream of security by the official visit before referred to. Here is a second letter, writ-

ten under the impression left by that visit. It is dated :—

“TOWER OF THE TEMPLE,
“5th February, 1795.

“GENERAL,

“The committee of safety have sent the monsters Matthieu, Reverchon, and Armand, to certify that our mute child is really the son of Louis XVI. What does the comedy mean? I can't understand Barras' conduct. He contemplates sending away the mute, and substituting a sick child. Do you know anything of this, or is it a mere pretence? I fear much, General, for no one is allowed near. If any one did closely examine the child, they would see at once he has been deaf from his birth, consequently speechless, but to substitute a sick child for him, seems folly. The sick one would speak, and so do away with the chance of him we have more than half saved. Let me know your opinion.

“LAURENZ.”

Here seems to be an explanation of the historical fact that at one period of his imprisonment the boy dauphin remained obstinately silent, and

then, before his death, was suddenly restored to speech.

Another curious evidence remains. At a trial before the Law Courts on the 3rd of November, 1834, a medical man well known in Paris, and of high standing, was examined on oath. Doctor Remusat deposed as follows :—

“In the year 1811 I was a student at the Hospital, and saw there frequently a woman named Simon. One day I heard her complain of want of attention on the part of the hospital authorities. ‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, ‘if my child knew of it I should not be here.’

“‘I don’t see,’ I replied, ‘what help you could wish for more than you have now.’

“‘Ah!’ was the answer, ‘but you don’t know what child I mean. I speak of my little Bourbon.’

“‘Your little Bourbon!’ I repeated amazed.

“‘Yes; I was *gouvernante* to the child of Louis XVI.,’ she remarked, seeing my astonishment.

“‘But he is dead long since,’ I ejaculated.

“‘No, he is not,’ was the quick reply made to me, and then followed the details as to how the boy dauphin had been conveyed away in a basket of clothes.

The English statesman, Pitt, believed in the existence of the Lost Prince, and the Allied Powers, when framing the treaty of 1814, allowed for the possibility of his reappearance. Charette, Pichegru, and Georges Cadoudal firmly asserted his escape from the Temple, and, though unable to produce him, always referred to it as an acknowledged fact in their proclamations.

Many in France believe in it to this day, and a document dated Verona, 1812, was signed by Louis XVIII., in which he assumes the title of Regent, not of King, of France.

NOTE II.

This account of General Buonaparte's conduct on the day of his famous coup d'état, which made him Consul, is taken from the printed narrative of an eye-witness, a member of the Council of the Five Hundred, who was in the Orangerie of St. Cloud at the time. It can be referred to at any moment, and the work exists in the Imperial Library, Paris. Here is a literal translation :—

“The position of Buonaparte became such that the only choice left him was success or death the

moment he left the Orangerie, and that moment had come.

“Every one knows that he was successful, but what few know and what people will be slow to believe, but which is a matter of fact, is that he owed that success to a most trivial circumstance. Cowed, humiliated, and beaten, he walked away. He had played his great stake, and knew the game was lost. A woman stood at the door of the Orangerie as Napoleon reached it. She gazed at him, hesitated for a time, then seemed suddenly seized with a strange enthusiasm. Turning to the crowd, her features working, and looking like an inspired oracle, she proclaimed him the Saviour of France. ‘Vive Buonaparte! Long live Napoleon!’ she cried. The cry was taken up slowly at first; then it spread, ran from mouth to mouth, until the whole mass of human beings who had been anxiously waiting the result, shouted madly, ‘Vive Napoleon, the Saviour of France!’

“The man who at a later period was crowned Emperor,—the man who overturned the thrones of Europe, and made kings of his successful generals, would that day have died on the scaffold if it had not been for that feeble woman’s

cry. I witnessed this myself, and attest its truth."

NOTE III.

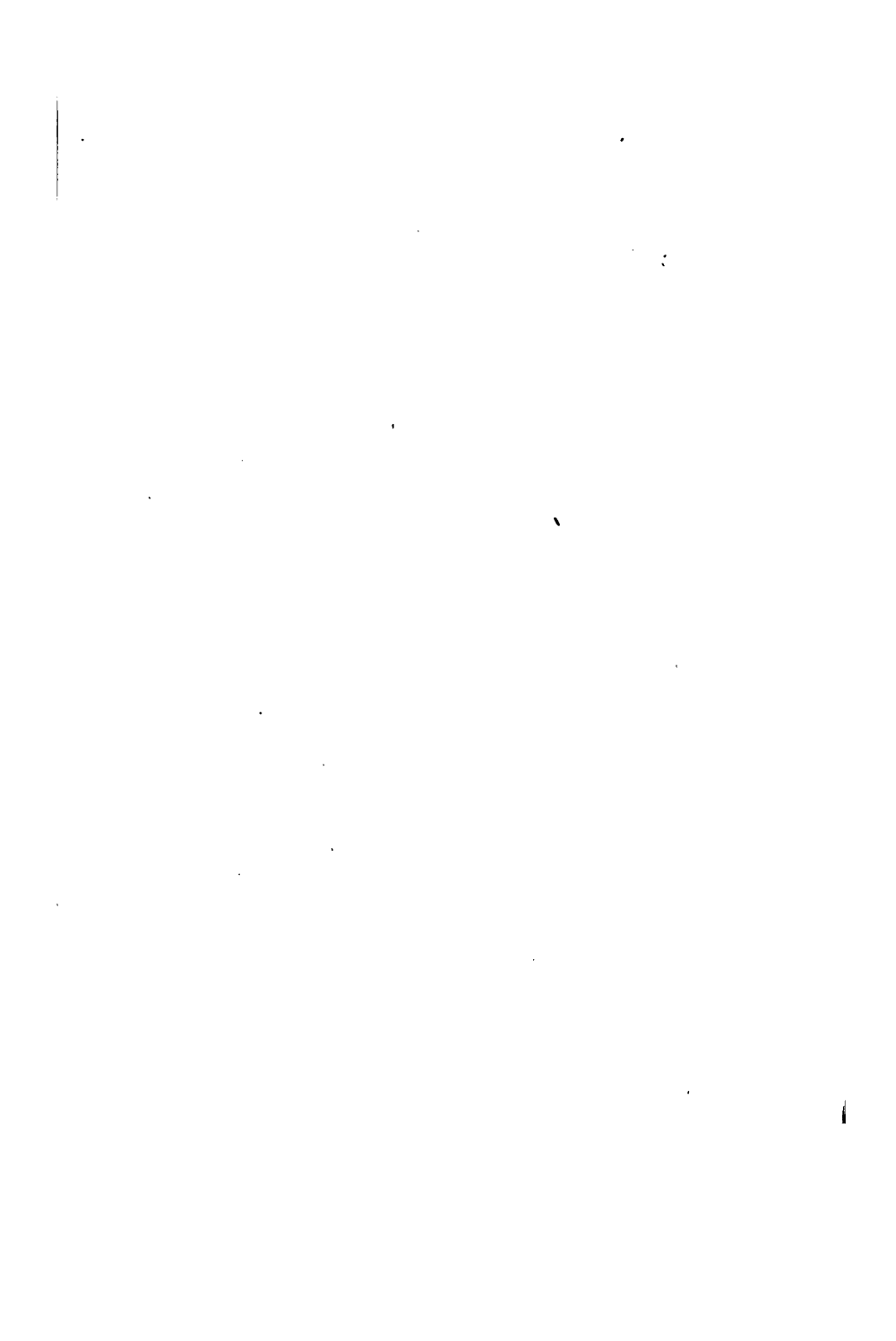
The anecdote here related is historical. It is one of the many acts of kindness which are still remembered as traditions connected with the name of Josephine, and some descendants of the Richard family yet inhabit the little farm-house of Pecq in the vicinity of Reuil.

NOTE IV.

Old Dumaine's tale is a true one. The circumstances, exactly as related, occurred during the winter of 1809 in the English Channel.

THE END.

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